FEDERICO FELLINI

INTERVIEWS

EDITED BY

BERT CARDULLO

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for one's self when young, and how, for everyone, the figures of the past, pleasant and unpleasant, become rarefied through the years into talismans. In any event, the viewer recognizes the fundamental verity of the film: that memory is the only place toward which life heads certainly. And he or she recognizes a secondary verity as well: that, in transferring the recesses of recall to the screen with the knowledge that his past was no longer verifiable fact, it was an all-obsessing dream, Fellini established anew the primal commonwealth of cinema and dream, movies and memory, psychic exploration and filmic fabrication. As Fellini himself put the matter in a comment to his long-time assistant Eugene Walker, "Think what a bale of memories and associations we all carry about with us. It's like seeing a dozen films simultaneously!" [6]

That last exclamation should give the reader some idea of Fellini's sense of humor, evident (as one might guess) not only in his interviews but also in his films. Indeed, what distinguishes him from other directors of his eminence is precisely his humor. Bergman proved his short supply of it in his few comedies. Antonioni rarely even attempted to be funny. And Kurosawa had humorous touches but they were almost always grim, not high-spirited. Fellini alone of this group looked on the world's woes, on human travail, with a mischievous eye. Comedy, of course, is by no means automatically synonymous with shallowness, something the filmmaker proved in *8½*, which was a cascade of bitter, funny, scintillating, sometimes deeply probing jokes on himself: for the silliness of his situation, of his century, of the plight of art, and for the absurdity of ever having been born.

Intervista (1987)—Fellini's penultimate picture—has the context of *8½* without its center. (His final film, *The Voice of the Moon* [1990], which may come closer to being surreal than any of his other works, did not gain an American distributor.) The framework is a visit to Cinecittà, the large film-studio complex outside Rome, by some Japanese television people who have come to interview Fellini as he prepares a picture based on Kafka's *Amerika* (a film that the director had at one time actually contemplated making). *Intervista* was thus yet another pseudo-documentary, like *The Clowns* and *Roma*, which proved how desperate Fellini was to find a film subject, a subject to film other than (literally) himself—how much in fact he had become, in a reversal of the

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Pirandellian scheme, an author in search of sundry characters. Fellini himself put a bold face on the picture when he described it to Peter Bondanella as "the ultimate result of my way of making cinema: where there is no longer a story or a script, only the feeling, precisely, of being inside a kind of creativity that refuses every preconceived order."[7] Nevertheless, this affectionate divertissement, which characteristically balances illusion and reality, can be seen as a self-homage from an artist who had earned the right.

Even as Fellini appeared as himself in *Intervista*, so too did Anita Ekberg, who had acted years before in *La dolce vita*. And her presence raises the subject of Fellini's view of women, here and elsewhere in his *oeuvre*—particularly in light of his famous comment to Gideon Bachmann in late 1980 that "the cinema [is] a woman," that "going to the cinema is like returning to the womb; you sit there, still and meditative in the darkness, waiting for life to appear on the screen." Fellini's view of women was never as empathetic as Antonioni's, whose moral protagonists were often females. And even when Fellini used a female protagonist, as in *La strada*, *The Nights of Cabiria*, and *Juliet of the Spirits*, she was a woman who accepted her life as determined by men. His women, then, are figures, often secondary ones, in a man's world: Fellini's own. This quality may in time date him, but it cannot affect his magic as a portrayer of that world.

That magic has something to do with the very nature of Cinecittà, where Fellini shot his films and to which *Intervista* can be viewed as an homage as well. What moves us at Cinecittà, why it is so powerfully mysterious to see a tower of arc lights beam into life against the dark, why the immense space of an empty sound stage seems to echo even when it is silent, is that here occurs an argument with mortality. The mere fact that film can fix the moment implies that time is rushing by even when the moment is being fixed. In other words, film, with all its fakeries, understands death. And Fellini, the most honest and lovable faker who ever made a film, understood life. He understood, as he related in an unpublished 1986 conversation with me, that "I have to recreate life in a studio instead of using actuality, because I have to put myself in it."

So he did, this most naked of all film geniuses at the same time as he was the world's greatest off-screen actor, convincing us throughout

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his career of his showman's honesty, his genuineness through artifice, in conjuring the past and the present, the fancied, the contrived, and the true, into a glittering show of his own truth—Fellini's, not the "Felliniesque," which is already something once removed from the real Italian thing. Let me conclude by quoting Guido's line from *8½* that he has nothing to say, but he is going to say it anyway. So too did Fellini, who in the process made it a pleasure, not a lesson, to be present at his creations.

As customary with all books in this series, the interviews herein have not been edited from the form of their initial publication. Consequently the reader will at times encounter repetitions of both questions and answers but it is the feeling that the significance of the same questions being asked and the consistency (or inconsistency) of responses will prove of value to readers in their unexpurgated form.

BC

Notes

1. From Dan Yakir, "The Italian Inquisition: Federico Fellini Interviewed," *Heavy Metal*, December 1984, 34–37.

2. From *Vogue*, March 1, 1970, 168–71+.

3. From Tay Garnett, *Directing: Learn from the Masters* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1996).

4. From Derek Prouse, "Federico Fellini," in *World Film Directors*, vol. 2, 1945–1985, ed. John Wakeman (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1988), 330–41.

5. From the *New Yorker*, October 30, 1965, 63–66+.

6. Eugene Walker quoted by Derek Prouse in "Federico Fellini," in *World Film Directors*, vol. 2, 1945–1985, ed. John Wakeman (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1988), 330–41.

7. From Peter Bondanella, *The Cinema of Federico Fellini* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

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CHRONOLOGY

1920	Federico Fellini is born on January 20 to middle-class parents, Urbano Fellini and Ida Barbiani, in Rimini, Italy, a small town on the Adriatic Sea. He is the oldest of three children, including a brother, Riccardo, and a sister, Maddalena.
1928	Runs away from a religious boarding school in Rimini (or so he claimed) and spends brief period with the circus.
1930	Attends school for the next eight years in Rimini.
1936–37	Publishes his first drawings in the short-lived magazine *La Diana*; these are caricatures of people who took part, along with Fellini, in a 1936 summer camp in Verrucchio organized by the National Fascist Party Youth Movement. Opens a portrait shop for tourists in Rimini.
1937	Upon graduating from high school, Fellini goes to Florence and draws comic strips for the humorous newspaper *420*.
1939	Moves to Rome. Enrolls in law school at the University of Rome but does not attend; uses his student status to avoid conscription. Works as a reporter for three weeks on the newspaper *Il popolo*. Joins the editorial staff of *Marc' Aurelio*, a bi-weekly journal of humor, politics, and satire, to which he contributes until 1942. Begins writing sketches for radio and gags for the movies. Leaves Rome to travel with a vaudeville troupe, writing gags and doing general support work.
1940–43	Back in Rome, Fellini gets scriptwriting jobs in the movies with the help of the comedian and actor Aldo Fabrizi; for

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his first six films as a screenwriter, four of them for the director Mario Mattoli, he goes without credit. Marries Giulietta Masina on October 30, 1943. Saved from the military draft when an air raid destroys his medical records. First screen credit, as a writer, is for Mario Bonnard's *Campo de' fiori* in 1943.

1944 After Rome is liberated, Fellini and friends open several "Funny Face" shops to draw caricatures of American soldiers. Continues to collaborate on screenplays without credit.

1945 Masina gives birth to a son, Federichino, on March 22, 1945, but he dies of a respiratory ailment after only three weeks. Meets director Roberto Rossellini and becomes involved in the writing of the script for *Roma, città aperta*.

1946 Works as a screenwriter and assistant director on Rossellini's *Paisà*.

1947 Writes for and acts in (his screen-acting debut) Rossellini's *Il miracolo*, Part II of the latter's *L'amore*. Collaborates with director Alberto Lattuada on the screenplay for *Il delitto di Giovanni Episcopo*.

1948 Works with Lattuada on the scripts of *Senza pietà* and *Il mulino del Po*, and with Pietro Germi on the screenplay of *In nome della legge*.

1949 Works as a screenwriter and assistant director on Rossellini's *Francesco, Giullare di Dio*.

1950 Co-directs his first feature film, *Luci del varietà*, with Lattuada; works with Germi on *Il cammino della speranza* and with Luigi Comencini on *Persiane chiuse*. Forms Capitolium production company with Lattuada.

1951 Works with Germi on the script of *La città si difende*.

1952 Debuts as a solo director with *Lo sceicco bianco*. Works with Germi on the screenplay of *Il brigante di tacca del lupo*, and with Rossellini (uncredited) on the script of *Europa '51*.

1953 *I vitelloni* wins the Silver Lion Award at the Venice Film Festival and becomes the first Fellini film to receive international distribution. *Un' agenzia matrimoniale* appears as part of the film anthology *Amore in città*, produced by Cesare Zavattini.

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1954 *La strada* wins the Silver Lion Award at the Venice Film Festival.

1955 *Il bidone.*

1956 *Le notti di Cabiria*. *La strada* begins a three-year run in New York City, receiving an Academy Award (Oscar) and a New York Film Critics' Award for Best Foreign Film. Fellini's father dies of a heart attack.

1957 *Le notti di Cabiria* wins an Academy Award as Best Foreign Film, and Giulietta Masina is voted Best Actress at the Cannes Film Festival for her work in this film. Writes *Viaggio con Anita*, a script inspired by his father's passing, but which will not be produced until 1979 (with many changes) by Mario Monicelli.

1960 *La dolce vita* receives the Best Film Award at Cannes.

1961 *La dolce vita* receives a New York Film Critics' Award and a National Board of Review citation as Best Foreign Film. Nominated for an Academy Award as Best Director for his work on this picture. Forms Federiz production company with Angelo Rizzoli.

1962 *Le tentazioni del dottor Antonio* (part of the film anthology *Boccaccio '70*, produced by Carlo Ponti).

1963 *8½* released and receives an Academy Award, a New York Film Critics' Award, and a National Board of Review citation as Best Foreign Film. Nominated for an Academy Award as Best Director for his work on this picture.

1965 *Giulietta degli spiriti* released and receives a New York Film Critics' Award and a Golden Globe for Best Foreign Film, as well as a National Board of Review citation for Best Foreign-Language Story.

1967 Suffers from an attack of pleurisy that causes him to be hospitalized for more than a month. No longer works with Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano, and Brunello Rondi as his scriptwriters, turning instead to Bernardino Zapponi.

1968 *Toby Dammit* appears as part of the film anthology *Histoires extraordinaires/Tre passi nel delirio*, a French production.

1969 Directs and narrates the documentary *Fellini: A Director's Notebook*, which is produced for NBC television in the

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United States. *Fellini-Satyricon*. Bob Fosse directs a movie version of the highly successful 1965 Broadway musical *Sweet Charity*, itself adapted from *Le notti di Cabiria*. Fosse's film stars Shirley MacLaine in the role originated by Giulietta Masina.

1970 Nominated for an Academy Award for Best Director for *Fellini-Satyricon*. Appears for the first time in one of his films, *I clowns*. Appears as himself in director Paul Mazursky's *Alex in Wonderland*, an homage of sorts to *8½*. Two documentaries on Fellini are released: *Ciao Federico!*, by Gideon Bachmann, and *Fellini: The Director as Creator*, by Michael Misch.

1971 *I clowns* receives a National Board of Review citation as Best Foreign Film.

1972 *Roma*.

1973 *Amarcord*.

1974 *Amarcord* receives a New York Film Critics' Award for Best Motion Picture, and it also garners an Academy Award and a National Board of Review citation for Best Foreign Film. Receives a New York Film Critics' Award as Best Director for his work on this picture. Receives lifetime achievement honors at Cannes. Plays himself in Ettore Scola's *C'eravamo tanto amati*.

1975 Nominated for an Academy Award as Best Director for *Amarcord*.

1976 *Casanova*.

1978 *Wizards, Clowns, and Honest Liars*, a documentary on Fellini produced by Roger Ailes.

1979 *Prova d'orchestra*. Nino Rota, who composed the music for all of Fellini's films from *Lo sceicco bianco* through *Prova d'orchestra*, dies on April 10. The film *All That Jazz*, Bob Fosse's musical homage to *8½*, is released.

1980 *Stardust Memories*, Woody Allen's film that references *8½*. Publishes *Fare un film*, an anthology of notes about his work and his life.

1981 *La città delle donne*. *8½* becomes the inspiration for the successful Broadway musical *Nine*.

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1983 *E la nave va* receives a fifteen-minute ovation at its premiere, out of competition, at Venice. Plays himself in Alberto Sordi's *Il tassinaro*.

1984 Films television commercials for Campari vermouth, despite all his previous protestations against television. Fellini's mother dies on September 27.

1985 Becomes the first recipient from outside the United States of the Film Society of Lincoln Center's annual award for cinematic achievement. Awarded an honorary Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival. *Ginger e Fred,* Fellini's only movie to receive its premiere (in Paris) outside Italy. Hospitalized for several days with circulatory problems.

1986 Films television commercial for Barilla pasta. Publishes *Viaggio a Tulun,* a script treatment, in *Corriere della sera*; this is a short account of his 1984 trip to Mexico to meet the Peruvian writer and anthropologist Carlos Castaneda. Receives Directors' Guild of America Golden Jubilee Special Award.

1987 *Intervista,* which marks Fellini's last appearance in a feature film, is awarded a Special Prize at Cannes and both the Audience and Grand prizes at Moscow. In Brussels, a panel of thirty professionals from eighteen countries names *8½* the best European film ever made and Fellini the world's greatest director.

1988 Publishes *Un regista a Cinecittà,* a book detailing his artistic life at the fifty-year-old studios where he shot almost all his films.

1989 Milo Manera, noted Italian cartoonist, adapts *Viaggio a Tulun* as *Viaggio a Tulum,* which begins appearing in the magazine *Corto Maltese* under Fellini's supervision. Fights without success against a law that will allow television networks to interrupt their showing of feature films with commercials.

1990 *La voce della luna,* Fellini's last completed film.

1991 Fellini's brother, Riccardo, dies on March 26.

1992 Films commercials for the Italian Republican Party and Banco di Roma. Ranked first in popularity in a survey of

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international film directors conducted by the British movie magazine *Sight and Sound*.

1993 Receives Academy Award for Lifetime Achievement in April. Suffers a stroke on August 3, followed by a heart attack; then, en route to recovery, dies from a second stroke on October 31 when he chokes on a piece of food while dining in a Roman restaurant.

1994 Giulietta Masina dies on March 23.

1999 Peter Greenaway cites Fellini in his film *8½ Women*.

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FILMOGRAPHY

1950
LUCI DEL VARIETÀ (VARIETY LIGHTS)
Producer: Capitolium Film (Alberto Lattuada and **Federico Fellini**)
Directors: **Federico Fellini** and Alberto Lattuada
Screenplay: Alberto Lattuada, **Federico Fellini**, Tullio Pinelli,
Ennio Flaiano
Cinematography: Otello Martelli
Production Design: Aldo Buzzi
Editing: Mario Bonotti
Music: Felice Lattuada
Cast: Peppino De Filippo (Checco), Carla Del Poggio (Liliana), Giulietta Masina (Melina), Johnny Kitzmiller (Johnny), Giulio Cali (Edison Will), Carlo Romano (Renzo), Folco Lulli (Conti)
35 mm, black and white
94 minutes

1952
LO SCEICCO BIANCO (THE WHITE SHEIK)
Producer: Luigi Rovere, for P.D.C./O.F.I.
Director: **Federico Fellini**
Screenplay: **Federico Fellini**, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano
Cinematography: Arturo Gallea
Production Design: **Federico Fellini**, Raffaelo Tolfo
Editing: Rolando Benedetti
Music: Nino Rota

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Cast: Brunella Bovo (Wanda Cavalli), Leopoldo Trieste (Ivan Cavalli), Alberto Sordi (Fernando Rivoli), Giulietta Masina (Cabiria), Fanny Marchiò (Marilena Velardi), Ernesto Almirante (fotoromanzo director), Ettore Margadonna (Ivan's uncle)
35 mm, black and white
88 minutes

1953
I VITELLONI (THE YOUNG AND THE PASSIONATE)
Producers: Peg Films, Cité Films (Lorenzo Pegoraro)
Director: **Federico Fellini**
Screenplay: **Federico Fellini**, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano
Cinematography: Otello Martelli
Production Design: Mario Chiari
Editing: Rolando Benedetti
Music: Nino Rota
Cast: Franco Interlenghi (Moraldo), Franco Fabrizi (Fausto), Alberto Sordi (Alberto), Leopoldo Trieste (Leopoldo), Riccardo Fellini (Riccardo), Eleonora Ruffo (Sandra), Jean Brochard (Fausto's father), Claude Farrell (Alberto's sister), Carlo Romano (Signor Michele), Enrico Viarisio (Sandra's father), Lída Baarová (Giulia), Arlette Sauvage (woman in the cinema)
35 mm, black and white
109 minutes

1953
"UN'AGENZIA MATRIMONIALE" ("A MARRIAGE AGENCY")
Episode in *Amore in città* (*Love in the City*)
Producer: Faro Films (Cesare Zavattini, Renato Ghione, and Marco Ferreri)
Director: **Federico Fellini**
Screenplay: **Federico Fellini** and Tullio Pinelli
Cinematography: Gianni di Venanzo
Production Design: Gianni Polidori
Editing: Eraldo da Roma
Music: Mario Nascimbene
Cast: Antonio Cifariello (journalist), Livia Venturini (Rossana)

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35 mm, black and white
110 minutes (*Love in the City*)

1954
LA STRADA
Producers: Carlo Ponti and Dino De Laurentiis
Director: **Federico Fellini**
Screenplay: **Federico Fellini**, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano
Cinematography: Otello Martelli
Production Design: Mario Ravasco and M. Marinari
Editing: Leo Catozzo
Music: Nino Rota
Cast: Giulietta Masina (Gelsomina), Anthony Quinn (Zampanò), Richard Basehart (The Fool), Aldo Silvani (Mr. Giraffe), Marcella Rovere (widow), Livia Venturini (nun)
35 mm, black and white
115 minutes

1955
IL BIDONE (THE SWINDLE)
Producer: Titanus, S.G.C.
Director: **Federico Fellini**
Screenplay: **Federico Fellini**, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano
Cinematography: Otello Martelli
Production Design: Dario Cecchi
Editing: Mario Serandrei and Giuseppe Vari
Music: Nino Rota
Cast: Broderick Crawford (Augusto), Richard Basehart (Picasso), Franco Fabrizi (Roberto), Giulietta Masina (Iris), Lorella De Luca (Patrizia), Giacomo Gabrielli (Vargas), Sue Ellen Blake (Anna), Alberto De Amicis (Rinaldo), Irena Cefaro (Marisa)
35 mm, black and white
114 minutes

1957
LE NOTTI DI CABIRIA (THE NIGHTS OF CABIRIA)
Producer: Dino De Laurentiis

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Director: **Federico Fellini**
Screenplay: **Federico Fellini**, Tonino Guerra, with opera lyrics by Andrea Zanzotto
Cinematography: Giuseppe Rotunno
Production Design: Dante Ferretti
Editing: Ruggero Mastroianni
Music: Gianfranco Plenizio
Cast: Freddie Jones (Orlando), Barbara Jefford (Ildebranda Cuffari), Janet Suzman (Edmea Tetua), Victor Poletti (Aureliano Fuciletto), Peter Cellier (Sir Reginald Dongby), Norma West (Lady Violet Dongby), Pina Bausch (princess), Pasquale Zito (Count of Bassano), Fiorenzo Serra (Grand Duke), Philip Locke (prime minister)
35 mm, color
132 minutes

1985
GINGER E FRED (GINGER AND FRED)
Producer: Alberto Grimaldi, for Stella Film and Bibo TV, Anthea, P.E.A., Revcom
Director: **Federico Fellini**
Screenplay: **Federico Fellini**, Tullio Pinelli, Tonino Guerra
Cinematography: Tonino Delli Colli
Production Design: Dante Ferretti
Editing: Nino Baragli, Ugo De Rossi, Ruggero Mastroianni
Music: Nicola Piovani
Cast: Giulietta Masina (Amelia or "Ginger"), Marcello Mastroianni (Pippo or "Fred"), Franco Fabrizi (master of ceremonies), Frederick Ledebur (admiral), Augusto Poderosi (transvestite), Jacques Henri Lartigue (priest), Totò Mignone (Totò), Luciano Lombardo (defrocked priest)
35 mm, color
127 minutes

1988
INTERVISTA (INTERVIEW)
Producer: Ibrahim Moussa, Aljosha Productions, RAI-Uno, Fernlyn
Director: **Federico Fellini**
Screenplay: **Federico Fellini**, Gianfranco Angelucci

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Cinematography: Tonino Delli Colli
Production Design: Danilo Donati
Editing: Nino Baragli
Music: Nicola Piovani
Cast: Sergio Rubini (journalist), Paola Liguori (movie star), Maurizio Mein (assistant director), Nadia Ottaviani (custodian of Cinecittà's archives), Anita Ekberg, **Federico Fellini**, Marcello Mastroianni (as themselves)
35 mm, color
105 minutes

1990
LA VOCE DELLA LUNA (THE VOICE OF THE MOON)
Producer: Mario Cecchi Gori and Vittorio Cecchi Gori, RAI-Uno, C. G. Group Tiger Cinematografica, Cinemax
Director: **Federico Fellini**
Screenplay: **Federico Fellini**, Tullio Pinelli, Ermanno Cavazzoni
Cinematography: Tonino Delli Colli
Production Design: Dante Ferretti
Editing: Nino Baragli
Music: Nicola Piovani
Cast: Roberto Benigni (Ivo Salvini), Paolo Villaggio (Prefect Gonnella), Marisa Tomasi (Marisa), Nadia Ottaviani (Aldina Ferruzzi), Angelo Orlando (Nestore), Susy Blady (Susy)
35 mm, color
120 minutes

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FEDERICO FELLINI

INTERVIEWS

เนื้อหาคุ้มครองลิขสิทธิ์

An Interview with Federico Fellini

GEORGE BLUESTONE/1957

IT IS EASY TO SEE why Federico Fellini's black Chevrolet has become a demi-legend. A book on *Le notti di Cabiria*, published recently by Capelli, includes a note by Pier Pasolini describing it. And after an evening's drive you can see why Fellini's friends remember it.

At first, Fellini's driving is unsettling. He weaves in and out of traffic, misses pedestrians by inches, swerves away from Nomentana's interminable monuments, dodging yellow traffic blinkers as if he were trying out a darkened slalom. But after ten minutes or so, your confidence is restored. For two things have dawned on you by then. The first is that Fellini has no particular destination in mind. He *likes* to drive. He is carelessly at ease at the present moment. He will stop and run into a bar to make a phone call, pick up a friend at a downtown *albergo*. But, clearly, driving is diversion for him, a release for his battery energy which, like a storage cell, renews itself in motion. The second thing to dawn on you is that Fellini is really an expert driver. Appearances aside, the Chevrolet is at every moment under Fellini's control. As one hand lightly guides the wheel, the other gestures—it acts. You remember Rossellini's description of him: "He is at once imprecise and precise." And Geneviève Agel's: "Fellini is a visionary of the real." The inevitable question occurs to you. When Masina and Quinn and Basehart were being directed by Fellini, was it like driving with him through a blinking Roman night?

From *Film Culture* 3, no. 3 (13), (October 1957): 3–4, 21. Reprinted by permission.

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Once you relax, you can watch his face. He is bigger than he seems from his pictures, and younger. The faint brush of gray in his black mane is right for a director with an international reputation at thirty-six. It gives his youth exactly the authority it needs. When an interviewer once asked him, "What for you is the greatest human quality?" Fellini answered, "Love of one's fellows." "The greatest fault?" "Egoism." His answers are enacted in his face. The eyes are gentle. They empathize, even suffer. The nose is aquiline, proud. Like a *saltimbanque*, he combines the simple dreamer and the hardened vagabond. You can understand why he once expressed a desire to have known both St. Francis and Satan. After Cannes, a young French critic, Jean-Marie Daillet, was to write: "Fellini speaks little, but he is cordial; he is introspective, but not narcissistic; his temperament is ultra-sensitive, but not disturbed. He does not ask himself about the future of what the critic calls Fellinism. Images and ideas accumulate in him and empty into his films and all that interests him is the evolution of one to the other." It is all true. As he drives, he talks, but not easily. His large hands are often more expressive than his speech. He would clearly rather drive than talk.

INTERVIEWER: *I have heard that an unofficial Vatican censor wanted to keep* Le notti di Cabiria *from going to Cannes, but that Cardinal Spira of Genoa was responsible for getting your film approved. Is this true?*
FELLINI: Where did you hear this?

I: *I read it. In* Cinema nuovo, *I think.*
F: Oh, well, if you want to understand my work, don't read *Cinema nuovo.* They have called *La strada*—called me—a traitor to neorealism. In Italy, it is very difficult to find honest, objective criticism about directors. There are too many special interests.

I: *But there is some truth in the Cardinal Spira story?*
F: There are certain rumors. They . . . are unimportant.

I: *Do you find any problem of censorship over here?*
F: For the filmmaker there has always been censorship. In every country. In Italy, if it has not come from the Church, it has come from the bureaucracy. If not from the bureaucracy, then from the Communists.

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BACHMANN: *You don't mean simply to put the camera in front of "life" and photograph what's there?*

FELLINI: No, it's a question of having the feeling for reality. Naturally, there is always the need for an interpretation. What has happened in Italy is that after the war everything for us was completely new. Italy was in ruins; you could say everything you felt by just looking around. Later, the leftist press capitalized on this inadvertent one-sidedness by saying that the only valid thing to do in films is to show what happens around you. But this has no value from an artistic point of view, because always the important thing is to know *who* sees the reality. Then it becomes a question of the power to condense, to show the essence of things. After all, why are the films we make so much better than newsreels?

BACHMANN: *Though, of course, even newsreels are already one step removed from reality, through the selectivity of the cameraman who took them.*

FELLINI: Right. . . . But why should people go to the movies, if films show reality only through a very cold, objective eye? It would be much better just to walk around in the street. For me, neorealism means looking at reality with an honest eye—but any kind of reality: not just social reality, but also spiritual reality, metaphysical reality, anything man has inside him.

BACHMANN: *You mean anything that has reality for the director?*

FELLINI: Yes.

BACHMANN: *Then the completed film is really* two *steps removed from nature: first the personal* view *of it by the director, and then his* interpretation *of that personal view.*

FELLINI: Yes, yes. For me, neorealism is not a question of *what* you show—its real spirit is in *how* you show it. It's just a way of looking around, without convention or prejudice. Certain people still think neorealism is fit to show only certain kinds of reality; and they insist that this is social reality. But in this way, it becomes mere propaganda. It is a program: to show only certain aspects of life. People have written that I am a traitor to the cause of neorealism, that I am too much of an

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individualist, too much of an individual. My own personal conviction, however, is that the films I have done so far are in the same style as the first neorealist films, simply telling the story of people. And always, in telling the story of some people, I try to show some truth.

BACHMANN: *Is there any underlying philosophy in your films? I mean besides the depiction of what is truth for you.*

FELLINI: Well, I could tell you what for me is one of the most pressing problems, one which provides part of the theme for all my films. It's the terrible difficulty people have in talking to each other—the old problem of communication, the desperate anguish to be *with*, the desire to have a real, authentic relationship with another person. You'll find this in *I vitelloni*, in *La strada*, in *Il bidone*, and also in *Notti di cabiria*. It may be that I'll change, but for now I'm completely absorbed in this problem—maybe because I have not yet solved it in my private life.

BACHMANN: *Do you feel that the reason for this difficulty in interpersonal communication is that we have created a kind of society which makes it hard for people to have true relationships?*

FELLINI: It is the fault of society only because society is made up of men. I believe that everyone has to find truth by himself. It is completely useless to prepare a statement for a crowd, or make a film with a message for everyone. I don't believe in talking to a crowd. Because what is a crowd? It is a collection of many individuals, each with his own reality. That is also the reason why my pictures never end. They never have a simple solution. I think it is immoral (in the true sense of the word) to tell a story that has a conclusion. Because you cut out your audience the moment you present a solution on the screen. Because there are no "solutions" in their lives. I think it is more moral—and more important—to show, let's say, the story of one man. Then everyone, with his own sensibility and on the basis of his own inner development, can try to find his own solution.

BACHMANN: *You mean to say that by "ending" a problem, the filmmaker takes away from the audience the feeling that what they are seeing is the truth?*

FELLINI: Yes, or even worse. For when you show a true problem and then resolve it, the spectator is beguiled into feeling that the problems

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in his own life, too, will solve themselves, and he can stop working on them for himself. By giving happy endings to films, you goad your audience into going on living in a trite, bland manner, because they are now sure that sometime, somewhere, something happy is going to happen to them, too, and without their having to do anything about it. Conversely, by not serving them the happy ending on a platter, you can make them think; you can remove some of that smug security. Then they'll *have* to find their own answers.

BACHMANN: *This would seem to indicate that you're not just making pictures to make pictures, but because there are certain things you want to say.*
FELLINI: Well, I don't start that way. What usually starts me on a film idea is that something happens to me which I think has some bearing on other people's experiences. And the feeling is usually the same: to try, first of all, to tell something about myself; and in doing so, to try to find a salvation, to try to find a road toward some meaning, some truth, something that will be important to others, too. And when, as often happens, people who have seen my films come to visit me—not to discuss my films, but to talk to me about their personal problems—I feel I have achieved something. It is always a great satisfaction for me. Of course, I can't help them clarify their problems, but it means the picture has done some good.

BACHMANN: *When you say you don't start that way, do you mean to say that the real "message" of your films develops out of the material?*
FELLINI: Well, a picture is a mixture of things. It changes. That is one of the reasons why making films is such a wonderful thing.

BACHMANN: *Could you tell me about the process in your film work? A kind of step-by-step description of your work on any given film?*
FELLINI: First, I have to be moved by a feeling. I have to be interested in one character or one problem. Once I have that, I don't really need a very well-written story or a very detailed script. I need to begin without knowing that everything is in perfect order; otherwise I lose all the fun of it. If I knew everything from the start, I would no longer be interested in doing it. So that when I begin a picture, I am not yet sure of the location or the actors. Because for me, to make a picture is like

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leaving for a trip. And the most interesting part of a trip is what you discover on the way. I am very open to suggestions when I start a film. I am not rigid about what I do. I like the people with me on the film to share this new adventure. Certainly, I do remember that I am shooting, sometimes.

When the picture is finished, I would, if possible, like not to see it. I often say to my producer, joking: "Let's not cut this one; let's make a new one instead." But I cut all my own films. Cutting is one of the most emotional aspects of film-making. It is the most exciting thing to see the picture begin to breathe; it is like seeing your child grow up. The rhythm is not yet well identified, the sequence not established. But I never reshoot. I believe that a good picture has to have defects. It has to have mistakes in it, like life, like people. I don't believe that beauty, in the sense of perfection, exists—except maybe for the angels. A beautiful woman is attractive only if she is not perfect. The most important thing is to see to it that the picture is alive. This is the most rewarding moment in making films: when the picture begins to live. And I never go back to look at what I have already done—I edit the whole film right through. When it's finished, and I go into the projection room to see it for the first time, I like to be alone. I can express exactly what happens. I look at the picture; the picture looks at me. A lot of things happen. Some ideas are born; some die. Later I begin to "clean" the picture. In Italy we do not use the sound we shoot on location, but redo the whole track in the studio. But the first answer print still has the location sound on it. Once that is removed, something happens again. The answer print still has the flavor of the adventure of making the film—a train that passed, a baby that cried, a window that opened. I remember the people who were with me on location. I remember the trip. I would like to retain these memories. Once they put the clean, new track on it, it's like a father seeing his little girl wear lipstick for the first time. You have to get to know this new creature that is emerging; you have to try to like it. Then when you add the music, again something is added and something is lost. Every time you see it again, there is some new feeling. When it is completely finished, you have lost the objective point of view. Then, when others see it, I react personally—I feel they have no right to say anything about *my* picture. But I listen carefully, nevertheless—I am trying to find out whether for them the picture is alive.

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BACHMANN: *Do you feel that in all the films you have made you have always remained faithful to what you were trying to say when you started the picture?*

FELLINI: Yes, I do.

BACHMANN: *Do you feel there is a relation between your work and that of the current crop of Italian writers, like, for example, Carlo Levi and Ennio Flaiano?*

FELLINI: Yes, I think this core of neorealism in films has influenced all the arts.

BACHMANN: *Have you, yourself, done any writing except scripts?*

FELLINI: No. Just some short stories when I worked for newspapers. But not since I've worked in films. It's a different medium. A writer can do everything by himself—but he needs discipline. He has to get up at seven in the morning, and be alone in a room with a white sheet of paper. I am too much of a *vitellone* to do that. I think I have chosen the best medium of expression for myself. I love the very precious combination of work and of living-together that filmmaking offers. I approach filmmaking in a very personal way. That's why I consider myself a neorealist. Any research that a man does about himself, about his relationships with others and with the mystery of life, is a spiritual and—in the true sense—religious search. I suppose that is the extent of my formal philosophy. I make movies in the same way that I talk to people—whether it's a friend, a girl, a priest, or anyone: to seek some clarification. That is what neorealism means to me, in the original, pure sense. A search into oneself, and into others. In any direction, any direction where there is life. All the formal philosophy you could possibly apply to my work is that there is no formal philosophy. In filmmaking, as in living, you must take the experiences that life presents, those which apply to yourself and to others. Except that in filmmaking only the absolute truth will work. In life I may be a swindler or a crook, but that wouldn't work in a film. A man's film is like a naked man—nothing can be hidden. I must be truthful in my films.

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spicy content of his short stories in the *Decameron*.) The other episodes will be directed by Rossellini, Antonioni, De Sica, Monicelli, and Visconti. Fellini's episode tells the story of a serious doctor who becomes obsessed by the billboard image of a girl (Anita Ekberg) who, lying lasciviously on a couch, offers the passerby a glass of milk.

"*Boccaccio '70* is a joke," says Fellini. "I accepted this competitive cooperation because the title is a challenge to censorship. All of us are fighting censorship because it is just a political weapon. No one has the right to elect himself as a tutor of others, in art. There are still attempts to restrict individual freedom in art, but [and here Fellini speaks with an almost prophetic accent] these are the last attempts to impede the birth of modern man. There may be some martyrs in this battle, but I feel that we are at the end of the night, even if dawn is still a little far."

"Is it true that you are a friend of a cardinal who helped you out of censorship troubles concerning *Cabiria* and *La dolce vita*?"

Fellini smiles at this blunt question. "What is wrong in being the friend of a cardinal?" he answers, trying to evade. Then he adds: "I didn't have much trouble with *La dolce vita*, except after the movie had been shown. The Americans are seeing the movie in the almost uncut version, except for the two scenes that were cut in the English version; this same print was sent to the United States."

We have now arrived at the set and, as soon as they spot the Master, assistants and technicians rush to greet him and crowd around him murmuring respectfully, "Buon giorno, Maestro. . . ." It is a welcoming scene that resembles a mystic and spectacular ceremonial. Fellini walks solemnly, patting shoulders here and there, almost paternally. Later he will tell us that he is well aware that such ceremony may amuse someone who is accustomed to the somewhat different atmosphere of the Hollywood studios, "but," he says, "here we still maintain the atmosphere of the craftsman and his disciples. It may be a leftover of the Middle Ages, but it is colorful and useful for the close cooperation necessary in producing a work of art." At this point I leave him, after accepting his invitation to return the following day. "We'll have lunch together in the interval between shooting. . . ."

The following day I arrive at the set in time to witness Fellini's directing style. It is easy to see that he is a perfectionist. He stays behind the

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what a good review does to my *future* work, because when I read it the wish to work comes to me. If a critic speaks badly about me—I mean, about my films—it makes me depressed and unhappy. Such a critic is really dangerous to me. He is my most mortal enemy. I feel almost imprisoned by his application to my work or myself of judgments based on standards established independently of me. Because that is what the professional intellectual spends his time doing: storing life away in carefully labelled, plastic drawers. They talk of "understanding" life or art, but they are really only comparing expressions. You end up being "like Proust" or "influenced by Bergman." I think that is because they can't originate real thoughts, because they don't have their own inner moral compass. Through their series of labels, definitions and conceptions, they close themselves off from a true comprehension of life. What is there to "understand"? How can they ever understand? That figure of the intellectual is a nightmare for me, a ghost, walking in his death. In reality he is afraid of life, and he wants to tag everything, like a compulsive baggage attendant at a railway station, so that he can feel he is still at the centre of everything. It is at the moment he labels life that he renounces it: his principles become the bars of his jail . . .

Fellini was driving me to the station, after dinner at his house at Fregene outside Rome. He drives well, and much. I don't believe in psychologising things, so I feel it's just because he likes to keep moving. I noticed he was driving on beyond the station. Sometimes he is difficult to get started on something; mostly it is equally difficult for him to stop. He was driving me home, to Rome. I said nothing. I was hoping that it would mean he'd keep talking, too. It was dark, and the summer country roads were wet. Suddenly, without apparent connection to what had gone before, he said: "You know, my life is very short." Perhaps my face expressed concern, because he suddenly laughed:

F: No, I'm not ill. I mean my life as a film director. I feel that of all artists, the productive span of a film director is the shortest. Perhaps ten years, at most fifteen. It's such a mess to make films, you have to be absolutely sure of what you want to say.

B: *Is that why you feel so personally involved? Your heroes don't seem to be such ideally complete people.*

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F: I don't think that I create heroes in my films in the conventional romantic or poetic sense. But there is always someone, like Guido in *8½*, who fights against the monsters, against neuroticism and fear, against the real dangers. His story can be told in many ways, but it is always the same story. Sometimes, in fact, I feel that I am all the time making the same film. Take *8½*. It could have been a fairy story. The Saraghina could really have been a dragon that spat fire, Guido's wife could have been an inquisitor who condemned him, and the cardinal could have been another monster from the flames of darkness. Or one could make a fable out of the story, like Ariosto did with *Orlando Furioso*. I simply told it as I did because for me this was the most congenial manner. It reaches people better; I think it's the more modern way. But the hero is really there: he is the one who in all the fairy tales succeeds in possessing the feeling of his own life, after cleaning up all the monsters that want to devour him.

B: *Do you mean that in all your films you tell the same story?*

F: Sometimes I get that feeling. But I can't say that I have a special direction, although I feel a certain evolution in myself and in the ways I find of saying things. I want to look at things from all sides; not to try to make them conform to a preconceived idea. So I'm interested in man, but on all his various levels, in his miscellaneous conditions and dimensions. And after all, I'm only a man myself. Maybe that answers your question about my personal involvement: I feel that an artist always talks about himself, and that the simple, daily things that go into a film should bear witness to being the fruits of the artist's anguish and concern. I don't want to sound as though I know the final answer. I keep seeking. Actually that's all I want to show: that I am seeking.

I don't want to make pictures so that they can be "understood". This whole business about clarity seems to me to be some kind of an aristocratic game, like heirs gossiping at a funeral. All I want in my pictures is a real man, who lives a real life, who worries about money, about his wife, about the Church, and about his work. You know what I don't understand? I don't understand when people say they don't understand. You watch the story of a man who tells you about his work, his mistresses, his troubles, his relationship to God. There is nothing to understand: there is just listening and feeling whether the problems of this man are your own problems. That's all.

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B: *Here, then, is one of those eternal questions that critics are always asking. Don't you care whether your audience "understands" your intentions? You must have thought about this question of the relation of artist to audience.*

F: How can I worry about something completely unknown? Anyway, what does that word "audience" mean? Who are they? It is a monster without any collective conscience or identity, and so it is impossible to be conditioned by their wants. If you pay attention to all that, you put yourself in a very humiliating and subservient position: that of slave to a very mysterious boss, a boss who doesn't know what he wants. It's the worst position for a man to find himself in, that of serving. It is up to you, as an artist, to be the boss. How could I possibly be concerned with the specific demands of people all over the world? All the millions of different desires . . . I don't make a film with Anita Ekberg because they like her in the U.S.A., or a picture about the benefits of drinking milk just because they like it in Switzerland. I just say something that I like to say, and because I am a normal man, I think that my problems and likes and dislikes, my fears and hopes, should interest other normal people. It is possible that subconsciously I try to tell a story that can be understood, but I think that the only people who will fail to understand are those who go to the cinema with the *intention* of understanding, so that they are really no longer free to react emotionally and without bias. And that kind of person will fail to understand *any* story.

B: *You seem to take rather a collective view of the audience, despite the fact that you deny them a collective identity.*

F: It is really more compassion, like one has for a flock of misguided sheep. The "audience" is in the final analysis nothing but a creation of the filmmakers. It is corrupt because it has been violated. In the hands of traditional filmmakers, the cinema has become a form of art which allows no space for meditation. Instead, it has become a medium for psychological aggression; it assails you with its demand for a specific reaction. In this way, it has created a standard kind of reception, which is manoeuvred from the outside, by the author. People have become used to a certain approach: they have become used to being emotionally violated. When a film comes along which doesn't do that, they "don't understand."

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B: *You feel that it goes both ways, then: that the filmmaker who pays attention to the audience becomes its slave, but at the same time, the kind of cinema which has been created until now in turn enslaves the audience, by preempting their emotional liberty?*

F: There is really no exchange between maker and viewer. There is no space in which to think. At least with paintings and books you can allow yourself the luxury of a private meditation. But with movies there is no freedom at all; and, what is worse, there is a complicity between producers and audience to perpetuate this state of affairs. For example, the cinema always allows you to guess the endings of pictures. It flatters your "intelligence" with "plants," like an Ellery Queen thriller. It pre-arranges your feelings. They have created a machine to violate your true reactions. And this goes so deep that when these guideposts are not planted the spectator feels lost.

B: *Are you speaking of all films to this date, or of what is essentially today an archaic form, the factory cinema? Aren't we coming out of this era of the violated intelligence?*

F: Films made after a formula, factory films, are of course the maximum point of degradation. But the cinema contains in its nature the danger of psychological suggestiveness. It just isn't a meditative form; it is potently naturalistic. A pistol shot in a film is a pistol shot that you hear—boom!—with your ears. All representations of reality in film appear to be "objective," but they are really coordinated so as to assail the spectator with a definite point of view. It is much more difficult for a filmmaker to be sincere than for a writer or an artist or a musician, because the means he uses are extremely dangerous. They are means—camera, editing, sound, movement—which tend to function directly on the plane of intellectual and psychological aggression. And they are very delicate weapons, and thus the more invincible. Film can influence you like music, like a tom-tom, like a form of magic. It is like playing a certain rhythm on an instrument—after a while everyone taps it along with you. Now, when this fantastic power is used for the liberation of the spectator, in other words when it is white magic, it is all right. But if it is used as black magic, it can lead to terrible results. It can parallel the influence that Hitler had and carry us to disaster.

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B: *So you feel that films can have a real sociological influence?*

F: In the negative sense, definitely. For example in the promotion of collective thinking. To hear film distributors and producers talk of their public as having an "average mental age" of between thirteen and seventeen! It should make them want to help this audience to grow up, instead of making films for that kind of mentality. If one says constantly, "we are speaking to children," one conditions oneself to speaking childishly. But the mature mind wants to *discover*, not to *be told*. That's why I want to show man on all his various levels. I want to tell stories as one does in a bar: you like it or you don't, but you don't say "what does it mean?" One man listens, another goes off home to bed. That's another reason why people always say my movies are autobiographical—men who talk in bars mostly talk about themselves.

Pictures are like friendly talks between men. That is the real key to this question. I want to create an atmosphere in which it will be pleasant to listen to one man tell his story. All I ask is that people listen and look. That is another reason why we have to make all possible efforts to free the movies from the trappings of their own form, so that things will be more readily acceptable on a noncomplicated level. We have to get away from the slavery to the five senses, the alleged naturalism of the camera. It is completely phoney anyway: no camera and no tape recorder are "true to life," thank God. In fact, our apparatus is much less objective than the human eye. After all, celluloid and tape are twice removed from life. And a human intelligence intervenes in the recording process.

B: *Do you feel, then, that your own films are making a contribution towards greater simplicity, and towards a new way of responding to a film work?*

F: It is a very hard tradition to break. I hope that all good filmmakers are working towards abolishing it, but there is so much to be done. Very few filmmakers really invite the audience to participate in the inner feeling of the filming. And most authors are still trying to fill out every dark corner, leaving nothing to the imagination and feeling of the viewer. It's the rigidity of this concept of "entertainment," which is supposed to take people "out of themselves." I guess I am trying to do just the opposite. But it's hard to uproot such an entrenched education. And, you know, I don't want to go to extremes: that's just as bad as

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putting labels on things. So I don't say that people shouldn't have fun when they go to the movies—after all, I'm having the greatest fun of all in making the films—but I don't want only entertainment or only philosophy or only religious things. It has to be in between. To go to the movies shouldn't be just like going out to dinner, neither should it be like going to school. It has to be a middle way . . .

B: *And do you feel people are ready for a new approach?*

F: People are always ready to be given confidence. And I'm not demanding any complicated decisions, or intellectual capacities. Really, I just want them to be themselves. It would be nice if after a certain time an attitude to films could be cultivated which matched people's attitudes to the other arts. For instance, that films should be seen twice. Seeing everything quickly, sitting and smoking with a nice woman . . . that is another basic limitation of movies: their quality of vulgarity. You are willing to listen twenty times to a symphony before you begin to feel what the composer has said to you. A real book has to be read, and read again. But movies . . . people treat them like football games. Despite anything that anyone will tell you, films are still in their infancy. But they could be the deepest and most exciting mirrors in which we could find ourselves and the rest of humanity. They have the potential of great magic, of being a way to think about ourselves, about our future. We could get to know ourselves better.

B: *Your saying that film isn't yet up to the other arts, reminds me of your previous objection to being compared to other artists. Don't you in any way feel related to any other man's work?*

F: No, I feel related to no one, it can't be put like that. But people are always making these comparisons, especially with *8½*, and then they expect statements from me about the differences. They ask me a lot of questions about Proust, about Joyce, even about Dante. I find it very mortifying each time, and especially with this film, to have to make declarations and to admit my ignorance. But I must finally come out and say something, because I see that the critics, by making this kind of comparison, tend to diminish the originality of one's work. I feel I have to say, then, that I have not read Proust, that I have not read Joyce . . . that I don't know a thing. I feel a grudge against this depressing habit

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of the critics, this way of tagging everything for their own convenience. And, much worse, it is also mortifying for the author they quote, because when they cite Proust in connection with *8½* I can say, sincerely, that I have not read him, which can be believed or not. But how can Proust defend himself . . .? The great spirits, the great authors, go beyond the pages of their books. The true being of men of culture, of men who make culture, exists also in the meat they eat and the air they breathe and in the eyes of the people they meet. Thus to say, ah, so and so recalls Proust, is to deny Proust a validity which extends beyond his work. And, you know, there is no need to engage in this vivisection of Proust or Joyce or Picasso. It is not necessary to have read books or to have seen paintings: life by now is conditioned by these works; they are the spirit of the time. So it is enough to live.

B: *Isn't there something more to being a contemporary artist than just being able to feel the times? What makes an artist, besides sensitivity?*
F: I can't answer that. But I can give you examples. For one, I believe deeply in artists from the provinces, because their cultural formation always takes place under the sign of fantasy—under a pressure which, held back and suppressed by silence and immobility, develops in a fantastic vein, as a dreamlike quality, which is the greatest wealth an artist can have . . . That is why I was so pleased when Rossellini called *La dolce vita* the film of a provincial man. For me that is the most beautiful definition, because the position of the artist faced by today's reality should indeed be that of a provincial: to be attracted by what he sees, but to maintain the detachment of the provincial. After all, an artist is like a provincial always, finding himself between a physical and a metaphysical reality. Confronted by a metaphysical reality, we are all provincials. And who is really a citizen of transcendence? Only saints. The delicate space between the worlds of the tangible and the intangible is the space of the artist. It is there that he reigns.

B: *Did you feel, though, that in order to be able to work in films, you had to live away from the provinces? You were born in Rimini, on the Adriatic, and when you decided to make films . . .*
F: I didn't come to Rome to make films. I sort of happened into the cinema; I don't even think I've had teachers. Rossellini was a

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fundamental influence, because it was when I worked with him that I understood that for me the cinema was not only my best way of expression, but the way of life I liked best. It so happens that for me, with my laziness and my curiosity, filmmaking—that is, relating my melancholy, my stories—is really the form which suits my temperament best.

B: *Do you think a filmmaker has to be a special kind of man?*

F: Another question that begs a dogmatic answer. I don't know. The cinema is very much like the circus; and in fact, if it didn't exist, I might well have become a circus director. The circus, too, is an exact mixture of technique, precision and improvisation. While the rehearsed spectacle is on, you are still taking risks: that is, simultaneously you live. I love this way of creating and living at the same time, without the limits set to a writer or a painter, through being plunged into action.

B: *Is action then a creative criterion?*

F: Definitions in art are meaningless; tags belong on suitcases. The question is really this: whether the one who at a certain moment wants to describe reality to others is capable of interpreting it first. Because if he isn't, he may as well not start. There is no use putting on film something that already existed before we arrive. That is why I feel that in art all means are permissible, and why I am so fond of filmmakers who are men of spectacle, a mixture of magician and juggler, of prophet and clown, of salesman and priest.

What is the cinema? It is an attempt to put certain fantasies in order and to relate them with a certain precision. For me, filmmaking is really a way of living; it contains all the facts of my life. I could never say, for example, that one aspect is more important to me than another, or that I like one film of mine better than another. It's all part of me; I wouldn't know how to choose. But action, or even feeling, is not enough; I don't agree that *anything* can be film material. I don't agree, for instance, with the old neorealist doctrine that filmmaking is an act of humility towards life. Of course I feel humble towards the life-process, but when I get to the camera, this humility must be completely abandoned. In fact, one must become very strict, the complete master not only of the actors but of all the objects, all the light, everything . . .

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because really, if you extend this business of humility towards life to your work with the camera, there would no longer be any need for a film director . . .

There is so much more to reality than meets the eye. Take any landscape. There is the tangible, superficial aspect and there is the hidden, mysterious, spectral aspect. What I am interested in is showing the things behind the things, not just making statements on what can be seen. I'm often criticised for this: people say that I see reality deformed and fantasticated. But I think that everyone sees life around him in a more-than-superficial manner. What's the sense of being "objective" in films? I don't even think it is physically possible.

B: *I assume that this means you don't believe in the possibility of a man making a film "from the outside": that is, as an observer, a documentarist, a travelling recorder?*

F: I don't believe in going from place to place to make films, no. You know, an artist really speaks only his own language. He is like a tree which has put its roots down exactly where it was born. If he were transplanted, he would miss that vital nourishment, physical, physiological, and spiritual, of his own tradition and culture . . . And don't forget; the things you grow up with, you know best, so that you feel most sure of them in case you are attacked. I think home is the place where a man has the best chance to express himself freely. Even if he is a modest artist, and even if he is limited by environment in the things he tries to express, these are more likely to be human things, things that really exist.

B: *It seems to me that one of your principles is a unity of work and being. Would you go so far as to say that an artist should not treat anything but himself and his own life?*

F: I would never say that. I simply feel that whatever he talks about, in whatever environment or time he places his story, it will probably be his own story . . . You know people say that *8½* is my own story; but it is not true in that direct autobiographical sense. My life is not so outstanding that I would ever consider making it the subject of a film. But I combine choreographic, scenographic, exterior aspects of situations that I am familiar with, and create a certain work, based on my experiences in life.

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And this is not unusual. Everybody, even an office clerk, in his work creates something out of his own experience. Therefore the relation between man and work, that is, the expression of yourself, is equal in every man. Also, as I said before, there are problems of the time, which are common to all. And, finally, there is the deep, metaphysical, transcendent aspect of your life, and that is something which concerns everybody.

B: *Where does the story you want to tell usually originate?*

F: Mostly it isn't even a story: it is more of an idea, a feeling. I don't want to have anything precise and definite at the start. I wouldn't take a trip that is all prearranged and prescheduled, either. It would be no fun. I guess that what really happens is an internal process. It's a vague, confused whisper, a new little light in the darkness, which announces a new game, a new round. It must be very carefully nourished or it will disappear, go out. So what I do is try to prepare everything for its future growth. I pamper it, make it comfortable, encourage it without pushing it too hard, make it feel wanted like a domestic animal. And slowly, slowly, it takes shape, until finally it actually takes possession of my body, makes itself at home in me, leads me on. Then, when work starts, when things crystallise, this thing lives me. No, no. I am not making a grammatical mistake. I am lived by my film. *Sono vissuto.* I swing in a rhythm in which I am carried by my creation; I am happy, healthy, never tired, never hungry. All I have to do is work, work and make love. And so I can do everything in a very gay way . . .

When the picture is finished, I have a sort of crisis: the happy, magic life ends, and I am again alone with all my real problems—God, wife, women, money, taxes—all things I have to resolve by myself. Sometimes I feel very badly indeed at that moment. I don't seem to be really living. My work helps me to be able to go on, to pass the weeks, the months. And it is often like a mirror for me, with which I can conduct a certain dialogue. It is my way of conducting the search into myself, although I don't expect to find any absolute solutions. In fact I hope I never do. What would I do with a solution? Isn't this the sense of life, this searching, searching . . .?

I think, for me, my films are ideal, in the sense that they are all about things within myself, and that I have built them around ideas which

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enchant me most. I always try to tell the stories that seem to me the most urgent, and I have been very lucky in being able to make the films I wanted to make. And so what has happened is that each of my stories is really a season of my life. Perhaps that is why I am sometimes thrown by criticism: I feel that my innermost being, and not just my work, is being judged and attacked, because I feel this total identity, this complete unity, between myself and my work.

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Playboy Interview: Federico Fellini

PLAYBOY/1966

PLAYBOY: *Among your friends, you have a reputation as a teller of tall tales. One of them, in fact, has gone so far as to call you "a colossal, compulsive, consummate liar." What's your reaction?*

FELLINI: At least he gives me credit for being consummate. Anyone who lives, as I do, in a world of imagination must make an enormous and unnatural effort to be factual in the ordinary sense. I confess I would be a horrible witness in court because of this—and a terrible journalist. I feel compelled to tell a story the way I *see* it, and this is seldom the way it actually happened, in all its documentary detail.

PLAYBOY: *You've been accused of embroidering the truth outrageously even in recounting the story of your own life. One friend says you've told him four completely different versions of your breakup with your first sweetheart. Why?*

FELLINI: Why not? She's worth even *more* versions. *Che bella ragazza*! People are worth much more than truth, even when they don't look as great as she did. If you want to call me a liar in this sense, then I reply that it's indispensable to let a storyteller *color* a story, expand it, deepen it, depending on the way he feels it has to be told. In my films, I do the same with life.

PLAYBOY: *Is that how you see yourself—as a storyteller rather than as a "conjurer," "modern moralist," "social satirist," or "ringmaster of a cinematic circus," as you've been variously described?*

From the Playboy Interview: Federico Fellini, *Playboy* 13, no. 2 (February 1966): 55–66.
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FELLINI: Those are impressive-sounding occupations, but as far as I'm concerned, I'm just a storyteller, and the cinema happens to be my medium. I like it because it re-creates life in movement, enlarges it, enhances it, distills it. For me, it's far closer to the miraculous creation of life itself, than, say, painting or music, or even literature. It's not just an art form; it's actually a new form of *life*, with its own rhythms, cadences, perspectives, and transparencies. It's my way of telling a story.

PLAYBOY: *Most critics agree that your storytelling technique is uniquely compelling; but they disagree, for the most part, on the moral and meaning of your films. Does this concern you?*

FELLINI: Do the critics have to understand my films? Isn't it enough that the public enjoys them?

PLAYBOY: *Are your films intended primarily as entertainment, then, or is their box office appeal secondary to philosophic intent?*

FELLINI: I'm not concerned with popularity, and it's pointless to speak of philosophic intent. After each picture I often don't recall what my intentions were. Intentions are only instruments to put you into condition to do something, to start you off. Many great works are done well *despite* their original intent. Pascal, for example, wrote the *Pensées* to demonstrate the nonexistence of God—and ended up doing just the opposite. Take *La dolce vita*. What I intended was to show the state of Rome's *soul*, a way of being of a people. What it *became* was a scandalous report, a fresco of a street and a society. But I never go to Via Veneto—it isn't my street. And I never attend *festas* of aristocrats—I don't know any. The left-wing press played it up as headline reportage on Rome, but it didn't have to be Rome; it could have been Bangkok or a thousand other cities. I intended it as a report on Sodom and Gomorrah, a trip into anguish and despair. I intended for it to be a document, not a documentary.

PLAYBOY: *Still, if we confine ourselves to the original impulse that inspired them, is there a common theme linking your films?*

FELLINI: My work can't be anything other than a testimony of what I am looking for in life. It is a mirror of my searching.

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inside me and I made him the incarnation of an imaginary person closely resembling me. A mysterious air arose on the set: I found myself ordering myself around like a disembodied spirit in limbo.

PLAYBOY: *Are you as close to Mastroianni in private life?*
FELLINI: Almost symbiotically so. Even though we seldom see each other outside of our work periods, we have such a profound rapport that it is like a mirror before me saying, "It's me. It's not me . . ." and so on. It's uncanny. This is the basic bond of our friendship; but he's also very humanly *simpatico*. I see in him a charge of enthusiasm, innocence, and charlatanry—like a smaller brother. And I'm no less an admirer of his professionalism. He's a very gifted actor.

PLAYBOY: *Are you as deeply involved with any other actors?*
FELLINI: Not so intensely, though I become terribly fond of all my actors, out of all proportion—because they are my puppets, creations of my fantasy. I claim they are the world's greatest actors and become ferociously defensive about them.

PLAYBOY: *Your wife, Giulietta Masina, has starred in several of your films. Does your personal relationship make it easy or difficult to direct her?*
FELLINI: Both. When I work with her, she seems the ideal actress: patient, docile, obedient, serious. She's not difficult—*I* am. I'm more impatient with her than with other actors. I get irritated if she doesn't immediately do what I have in mind. It seems incredible to me when she doesn't respond promptly just the way I want. You see, Giulietta is the first character I think about when I do a film with her. The others come slowly to mind, many months afterward, but always around her as the central figure. So when I get impatient and irritated with her, I feel like saying, "Giulietta! You were born first and the others came after you. You've lived in my mind so much longer than the others: why aren't you quicker?" I know that's unjust, but somehow it always goes that way. But I do like to work with her.

PLAYBOY: *Is she a good actress, in your opinion?*
FELLINI: Excellent. I think that she would have interested me as such even if she hadn't been my wife. Her mimicry, for example, and that little round face which can express happiness or sadness with such

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poignant simplicity. That little figure, with its tenderness, its delicacy, fascinates me no end. Her type is crystallized, even stylized for me. As an actress, she represents a special type, a very specific humanity.

PLAYBOY: *And as a wife?*
FELLINI: So many things. I'll try to be objective, but it isn't easy. We've lived together so long. The other day on the set, we celebrated our twenty-first anniversary. Twenty-one years. It doesn't really seem that long. There are still things to discover. Where were we?

PLAYBOY: *Discussing Giulietta as a wife.*
FELLINI: And such a wife—tender, affectionate, eternally solicitous. She always wants to know if I feel cold or if I want to eat. When we're shooting outdoors, she asks if my socks are wet. You know how women are. But she is not only my wife; she is also the one who inspires me. Over the years, she has become a stimulant for me, a symbol of certain feelings, certain moods, certain behavior. Our life together has been sprinkled with tragedy and joy, with tears and laughter, and this has given me material, inspiration for my work.

PLAYBOY: *Does she make any actual creative contribution?*
FELLINI: Only in the sense that she provides the sun and the rain that warms and waters the soil in which the seeds I sow eventually sprout—and occasionally flower into films.

PLAYBOY: *To continue your imagery, where do the seeds come from?*
FELLINI: I don't always know, but somehow, from somewhere, an idea arrives, and I carry it within me like an embryo for weeks, months, years—until finally it reaches the fetal stage and begins to assume a vague but tangible shape. Then, very tentatively, I begin to work on the first rough pieces of a script.

PLAYBOY: *You've said that looking at portrait photos of potential characters is a stimulant to the creative process at this stage. Why?*
FELLINI: It's a ritual form with me, a habit, a psychological conditioning to begin work. When I'm planning a picture, I see literally thousands of people in hundreds of mass auditions, and I keep all their

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photographs. I'm searching for faces to fit the characters I'm creating—or may create.

PLAYBOY: *You have a reputation for dragging out this preparatory period for month after month as though it were a drug, until finally you must be pulled away and forced into actual shooting.*

FELLINI: Well, it's not quite that addictive, and it's not always my fault for taking so long at it. Often these protracted preparations are caused by external factors—such as not finding a producer, or a producer who loses faith, or something else beyond my control. But postponements serve the positive purpose of giving me more time to create the right atmosphere for filming—time to create a kind of oxygen tent that will allow my creatures to live. This is made from many things—the script, costumes, photographs, a trip, a meeting with a girl, a fight with a producer, a change of office, an aimless walk around the house. All of this helps create a tent with enough air for the birth of this thing. That, for me, is the real effort, to take these steps that create the condition for the birth of the work. The film I make may not turn out to be the one I had in mind, but the main point is to see if, in the first two or three weeks of shooting, this thing is actually born alive. After that, it becomes self-sustaining—as though I were no longer directing, but rather that the film were directing me, pulling me onward.

PLAYBOY: *Is there any truth to the prevalent notion that you begin shooting with little more than the outline of a script; that, in effect, you direct your films off the top of your head, improvising scenes and dialog as you go along?*

FELLINI: If I wanted to commit artistic and economic suicide, that would be a beautiful and spectacular way to go. But since I don't, I arrive on the set with a script in hand—though it doesn't really mean that much, except as a pacifier for actors who fear improvisation, and for producers who crave reassurance that the structure for a film story has been created. What *does* matter is that I have a very precise idea of where I want to go in the film and how I want to get there long before the camera starts to roll. Once it does, of course, I try to remain flexible enough to amend and adorn the action as the need arises—rather than adhere blindly and fanatically to the original scenario as though it were Holy Scripture.

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"I Was Born for the Cinema": A Conversation with Federico Fellini

IRVING R. LEVINE / 1966

LEVINE: *Mr. Fellini, you are one of the most sought-after men in Rome for interviews. How do you feel about them?*

FELLINI: Well, it really depends, it depends on the day. Some days I feel stimulated and flattered at being interviewed, and other times a little less. As a rule, because of my talkative nature, I speak willingly, and I generally end up regretting that I have talked. I give an interview and read it a week later—I regret it. I always feel that I've spoken in a highly awkward manner and have talked too much, and therefore I plan never to be interviewed again, to stop being such a chatterbox. Instead, I always fall back on this sort of little game. However, here I am—ready to answer your questions.

LEVINE: *At various times in your life you have been a clown, a cartoonist, a humor magazine writer, a vaudeville performer, and a caricaturist. How and why did you become a director? Do your past professions help you in directing films?*

FELLINI: I don't think I chose the career of film director with any premeditation. As a young man during the first years of my work in Rome, I never thought of becoming a director. I began working in films as a writer. I was a journalist, and I started as a gag-man in some screenplays. Although I had the opportunity to go on set to talk to a director

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in correcting dialogue, I generally remained quite detached from the world of cinematography. I thought that I would never be able to command, to impose on the actresses—most of the times very beautiful women—to impose my will without becoming involved, without wanting to run away with them. I thought that the director's career was to some extent tyrannical and involved imperious authority, because of the charlatan and extrovert qualities it encompassed. I felt it would be the last profession in the world that I would have entered. And here I am in it, and I enjoy it.

So I think it is a sort of vocation, a little strange considering my personality—because I am really rather timid, and shyness clashes violently with the continuous exercise of the authority of a director. Probably I became a director to engage in a very spontaneous vocation.

And then, because of working in films as a writer, I was never satisfied at the way the directors for whom I wrote carried out the work. Suddenly one day I accepted a rash offer from a producer friend of mine and decided that I would do a film from a script that I had written. That's how I became a director.

LEVINE: *Do you feel that having had experience in various fields of work has made it easier for you to understand characterizations?*

FELLINI: Certainly, all of life is useful—that is, all the episodes of our life, especially for one who is a ballad-singer of life. Everything that has happened in his life is nourishment for the story he is to narrate. In this case particularly, the fact that I have been a journalist, the fact that I have done some drawing, that I had frequented the entertainment world and had become excited by this atmosphere, the atmosphere of show business—this helped me.

And I read all the time, searching for information. I have always been absorbed by it, and probably at that time I did not realize that I myself was supplying the storehouse from which, later, I would draw.

LEVINE: *Which of your films is your favorite? Which are you most satisfied with?*

FELLINI: Well, I can't be that objective about my work—that is, I can't give a critical judgment, I can't place myself before a film of mine with a judging attitude. It's not possible for me to make a critical comment

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because in wanting to do a film, and then finishing it, I don't remember anymore what it was that I wanted to do. So I lack the comparison—that is, I only have before me what I have done, and I no longer know if it resembles what I wanted to do. And so I lack the comparison to be able to judge how close I came.

What I say may seem presumptuous, but there is also a kind of respect towards the creation, towards the film, so that I feel alienated. It seems like something that I did not do, like a creature living outside of me. To pass judgment or attempt an interpretation seems almost indecent or unpleasant.

I can only have some sentimental preferences. I can say *La strada*, not so much for the film per se, but for what it reminds me of, for the season of my life in which I made it. *La strada* and *8½* are the films that I look back to favorably, and even this last one, *Guilietta degli spiriti*, so in this interview I can take advantage of a bit of publicity!

It is difficult for an artist to know what he does deliberately and what he does mysteriously or irrationally. It is difficult to draw a determining line. At best I can be informed as to what I do deliberately as an artisan—that is, the construction of the film, the professional and technical aspects. I know I want to obtain a certain effect—but for more inner motives, for meanings within the film, I don't think that it can be said that it is done deliberately. It comes about spontaneously and irrationally. I don't think that we can go into scientific research that tries to analyze every moment of the film and all the intentions of the author.

LEVINE: *In Italy, what are the most frustrating aspects of filmmaking?*

FELLINI: Well, I can speak of myself, of my experiences. However, I don't think there are any humiliating aspects that concern me. I am not a producer, so the financial aspects concern me only relatively. I have always made films for producers.

There is a law here—all films have financial backing from the State and in turn the State receives a rather substantial percentage, so you must not think that the Italian film industry is aided by the government in the form of patronage. It is a form of loan that the State gives, an advance that it later receives back.

This is an assistance on an economic level that I would rather do without, because if the film industry were a free enterprise like all the

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others it could develop, it could become adult, it could have a more important growth. Instead, this protective paternal aspect of State help allows the government to have a control over the films. At least it seems that way to me.

For what concerns me personally, I cannot have a victim's attitude regarding censorship. I have never had to cut out any frames in my films. I have made my films with complete freedom, and they were projected with complete freedom. I would be a hypocrite and a liar if I said that I have had any difficulty. For *La dolce vita,* it was necessary at times to explain to the government and the censors my intentions, but I have always had the highest understanding and respect. . . . This may not be so in other cases, therefore, as I said before, it would be better if the State help did not exist, because it is always a kind of paternal assistance that demands its own compensation, in practical terms, by means of control.

LEVINE: *What do you consider the ideal circumstances for making a film?*

FELLINI: Ideal is a word I don't like. It doesn't mean anything. The ideal circumstances are those that allow you to be able to make the film. Sometimes they can appear to be the worst circumstances—for instance in my case. It may be a producer who did not want me to do the film, the illness of an actress forcing me to choose another, a series of misfortunes that can determine the ideal circumstances because it was the way things should have been and because the film had to be different.

However, one can answer in another way: the ideal circumstances can be those I've mentioned. But it is really a form, it is an inner ideal circumstance. The ideal circumstance for the author of a film is sincerity, determined within him, the phenomenon of sincerity and spontaneity.

LEVINE: *What directors or films have influenced you, or what things have influenced you?*

FELLINI: I don't think I have had the precise influence of one filmmaker. I think that cinematography has influenced me. Films belong to an experience of our childhood, so it is possible that I may have been influenced by it as I have been by my family, by my girlfriend, by my wife, by the Church, by the education I received—that is, an artist is

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influenced in the sense that his emotional episodes of life become a part of him.

I don't recall a filmmaker who particularly . . . I can say that I have liked, which authors I have liked as a boy—naturally first of all, Chaplin. He is a kind of . . . is an author difficult to judge because of the extent to which he belongs in the myth of childhood. Chaplin is something like Santa Claus, like the mother—he is something that came into your life in the most tender period, the most malleable, which is the period of adolescence, and undoubtedly it left its sediment.

Then I have had a first and real experience in films with Rossellini, when I was involved in *Open City* and *Paisan*. I collaborated in the scripts of these films, and I also was able to follow these films in a rather comfortable situation—that is, not as assistant—I was not Rossellini's aide; I was a friend of Rossellini going along with him. So in a way Rossellini may have influenced me, not as an author of the world, but in the way he made films.

I saw that films could easily be made by living them, by making their rhythms vital. This is the most important discovery in my life for what concerns cinematography—to do as one writes, that is, without having to obey predisposed plans and without becoming involved in deteriorating aspects of the profession. That is, films could be made with this enormous machine, and the cinematography could be used as easily as one uses the pen in order to write.

I don't want to seem presumptuous in what I am about to say, but I don't seem to recognize an authentic paternity in any of the authors that I have mentioned.

I have made films by following a vocation very congenial to me. I began my life, after I finished school, by being a journalist, but for a long time I had thought, as a boy, that I would become an actor. Then I wanted to be a writer. And then I thought that I would become a journalist. I didn't think that I would have made films. Then things began to roll, and now I am able to say that cinematography was the means to the realization not only of the artist, but of the man, the realization of myself that seems more congenial to me. I wouldn't know how to place myself in another kind of profession or human activity, other than that of making films. It seems to me that I was born for the cinema, to do it without even realizing it, like breathing.

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Q: *Right.*

F: I do not have a particular system for this. It depends, picture by picture. Certainly, the part of choosing faces is very, very important for me. I think that the real moment is when I start to see the face in the picture because, I think when one is writing the picture, when one is thinking about the picture, it is always a very easy time. Living with a very vague imagination—everything is vague for me anyway, that is, well, that's that. But, when I start to choose the cast for the picture, that is the real moment. That for me is the hardest moment of the picture because I have to choose. Choosing is always very difficult because you lose one thing when you choose some other thing in its place. And it is difficult because seeing the other people, talking with them, gives me the feeling that they are all good. Just because they are alive, they make me feel that they can be *part* of my picture. So anyway, to try to answer it in a more serious way: when I start a picture I put a little advertisement in the paper saying that I am starting a picture and that I would like to see anyone, any kind of foolish one who wants to come to my office. And, seeing people, talking with them, looking at the ways that they are dressed, shoes that they have, faces and—Tony Quinn was just chosen for his shoes. So I start to understand that all those real fragments have some connection with the picture I have in mind. I can talk a lot about that, but are you satisfied?

Q: *From what you said, you seemed to be more concerned about their facial characteristics, about their shoes, about their hair, complexion. You have many people in your pictures who have very little acting ability or—maybe I'm wrong—you do cast complete amateurs. Are you concerned about their acting ability?*

F: Sometimes I choose someone for the character I have in mind not only because he is a good actor, but because I see that his eyes, or his voice, that this particular human being has a connection with the character I have in mind. It is very difficult to explain the system.

Q: *In* Satyricon, *did your leading players have any previous acting experience?*

F: One, the American boy, I think he has some theatrical experience because he was in *Hair*, in New York. The other one, the blond one, is

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an English actor who has never made movies. He has had some experience on the stage. They were new.

Q: *They came to you and applied for roles in the picture? How did it come about?*
F: No, no. The blond one, I chose him in London. I went to London because I thought in London it was possible to find some young boy, a beauty, but not heavy. I mean one who did not look sensual.

Q: *What happens if, from the time you cast an actor to the time you shoot, he undergoes a physical change, or a personality change? Do you still use this actor?*
F: Sometimes it happens that what you have been hoping for isn't in a person. You are a little bit disappointed, but I prefer to go on—I prefer to oblige myself to continue, to be led on anyway, and I try to use what is wrong. I try to use it in a good way. I try to make from a mistake an exception, something which becomes a gift.

Q: *You work very close to the actor or actress in some cases and sometimes not at all. Which do you prefer? Would you rather direct actors, in a sense, especially in* Satyricon, *as puppets, to insert emotion, or do you really want to feel your soul and their soul to become entwined during the filming?*
F: It depends. If I choose a friend just because his face will make a Roman emperor, I have to lose time to explain to him what was an emperor and how he thought. If I choose a stranger, I can just use him for what he can give to me physically. I try to help him, if you like, with certain shots. But working with actors, I like it if they participate in a very strong way in what we are doing. It is a different system. Or sometimes, when working with some people who are not actors, I pretend they are something more, deeper than professional or physical work. I pretend that he gives me something that he has inside; I begin to talk, to know him; I want him to become the character. In that case, the cooperation is much stronger.

Q: *Mr. Fellini, we've all read that you often come on the set with the actors not knowing what's going to go on during the day's shooting. This would seem to lead you to some kind of improvisational technique either on your part or on their part. As you're shooting, are you making up the dialogue*

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yourself, do you have these things written out specifically, or do you indeed do a great deal of improvisational work on the set?

F: No. That is stupid gossip. It's absolutely impossible to improvise. Making a movie is a mathematical operation. It is like sending a missile to the moon. It isn't improvised. It is too defined to be called improvisational, too mechanical. Art is a scientific operation, so I can say that what we usually call improvisation is in my case just having an ear and an eye to sense that things sometimes happen to be available from what happens during the trip of the picture. In that sense, I think, to be strictly faithful to what you have written four or five months before is a little bit silly sometimes. If you see that the picture is showing you some new suggestion, I think that one has to be open to this kind of suggestion because, sometimes, it is the "picture" that directs you when you work with faith and in an open and honest way. That is not improvisation, that is just being humble and faithful to what you are doing. Improvisation has nothing to do with that kind of work.

Q: *How were you able to get those huge crowds of people to act so well, to react as if they were living in ancient Rome?*

F: That is my profession. There is nothing mysterious, you know. I tried to take from each one what they can do, even when they don't know exactly what they are doing. Especially for *Satyricon*, I tried to suggest gestures, attitudes, looks, grimaces, in a very strange way because I thought that two thousand years ago maybe people talked or moved their hands in ways whose meanings have been lost. So for this reason I obliged the actors to talk like they do and move strangely just to always give the feeling that we are talking about, we are seeing an unknown society, an unknown world—just little tricks.

Q: *In a book I read about the picture 8½, it said that you had another ending for the picture—on a train.*

F: Yes.

Q: *At what point in making the film did you decide to change the ending of the picture and put it by the rocket ship? And how did you feel about that when you were changing the whole ending of your film?*

F: I shot most of the ending with the train. It was just for the plan of the production schedule. But, before the picture was finished I wanted

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to shoot a trailer. So, I asked the producer if it was possible to call back all the actors and all the extras who worked on the picture in that little circus at the end. Just to shoot an extravagant trailer. So, they came—two hundred people—and I asked for seven cameras—hand cameras—and I said to them to go on the staircase and when the music started, to come down, and walk and talk. And, I said to the second cameraman, "You, do what you want. Take just the people because it is a trailer in which I want to use my voice." When the music, the band started to play and all the people came down, I was very moved by this scene and this atmosphere and I felt this was the right ending for my picture. So, I said to the producer, "I have changed my idea. I don't want to use the train. I have a new idea for the ending and I will shoot, more precisely, the cast on the staircase."

Q: *Does that happen very often when you make a picture, that you let these things change as you go along? I mean for the rest of the picture was it definite, did you know exactly what you wanted to do?*
F: I know the young directors want me to say yes and . . . but no.

Q: *That's unusual for you?*
F: In this case I think it was a bit providential. Also, the meaning was always the same as in the ending with the train. This kind of communication of everybody's together. This kind of anticipation of shade and of light in his life. But that was expressed in an intellectual way with the train. When I saw this house of people, of harmony, I felt that it was the real ending of the picture.

Q: *In* Satyricon *it seems to me that you have gone further from a story line than ever before. It seems more like a series of fragments from the past than a developing story, and I wonder if you agree with that and also if you feel this is the way film is going to go in the next decade?*
F: Yes, it was certainly done purposely. First of all because I had taken the inspiration from the book called *The Satyricon* by Petronius. One of the most important aspects of the book for us—to me I think—is just that it is not complete; the author writes in fragments. That is a real stimulus because, if you participate, that book asks your complicity to

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try to complete all kinds of obscurities that are between one fragment and another one. It is like seeing some ruins, some archeological ruins; they are more suggestive, they are much more fantastic and much more beautiful, maybe, than the real thing. So, faced with this kind of suggestion I have tried to give that feeling in the picture—that it is a picture shot two thousand years ago and things remain with some obscurity between fragments. I try to give the same impression as an ancient fresco in which there are some destroyed figures in one corner. In another corner you see only one hand or one eye.

Q: *Do you feel that there is a relationship in the problems you dealt with in your other pictures, let's say for example* La dolce vita, *and* Satyricon*? Has there been a development or a continuity?*

F: I don't make pictures just to propose problems, but I think that there is a connection between one picture and another one. Sometimes it is very difficult to explain why you made one picture instead of another one. Just to make some newspaperman happy, I can invent a lot of reasons why I made one picture instead of another one. But, if I have to be really truthful—I can't say that a director can really know why he makes his pictures. If one knows it, I think he cannot make it. I don't want to appear esoteric, but it is difficult to be very honest in trying to understand what happens—there are historical coincidences. For *Satyricon* the coincidence was the contract that I had signed with Grimaldi. I started really a little bit anxious and a bit bored with the picture because, to make a picture about ancient Romans which has to do with extras, with big clothes, it's really very difficult. It's really a cliché. We have always seen pictures, big pictures from Avanti. They are a very, very big firm, and they worked together for years and years. So to try to introduce a new virginity to this kind of image, I really was a little bit afraid. And to excite me, to stimulate me in this picture, I said to myself that I had to refuse all the perfections, archeological, cultural, historical perfections. After all, I live in Rome and in Rome we think we know everything about Romans, but that's not true. So I see right away that to try to survive these adventures was just to say honestly that I don't know. I didn't know anything about what I wanted to talk about. At that moment I felt a bit lost, but I have felt that the health of these

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adventures was exactly to fix, to look into this complete obscurity—obscurity in myself, etc. And, that has given to me a certain kind of courage and I understood that the real key to trying to make this picture was just this unknown dimension, unknown in a psychological way, unknown in a social way—just unknown. For that reason, I said at the beginning something that the press office liked very much. I said it was a science fiction picture in a sense. Science fiction is something that we don't know, because we don't know what has been lost, or at any rate, is unknown. And I was afraid. At the same moment it was very exciting because I had the feeling that it was for me the real road.

Q: *Apparently you also told your press people that it was related to society today. Would you care to elaborate on that?*

F: That was not done on purpose; it was not problematic. I think that would be an operation a little bit too vulgar for me. But, certainly this kind of analogy is valid just because I live today. So now that I have finished the picture, I recognize that it's a picture about our time. Naturally there is a strong analogy. After all, you know Petronius is very modern also, very modern, also very touching.

Q: *The two young boys in the film seem very much the same person. Did you mean them almost as alter egos of each other, sort of two as one? This is philosophical.*

F: Not very philosophical—they don't look very similar.

Q: *No, not that they look similar. In fact, one is blonde and one's dark; but the actions, they seem to circle around each other as one person—two sides of one person. Did you intend that at all?*

F: No, but I am very easily convinced.

Q: *The dark youth appears twice in the film and seems to be on the sides that are opposed to the blonde youth. Once, in the boat, he is suddenly dressed like the nobles the blonde is fighting. Again, in the minotaur sequence, he's seen with the proconsul who is tormenting the blonde youth. Is this accidental? It seems almost mysterious that he suddenly should be with the aristocracy instead of with his own friends.*

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F: Yes, that is just what I was trying to explain before; that I had to do without the narrative explanation. We left him in a situation; now we find him in another situation. That was done purposely just to give the feeling of the unexpected things that happen in life—like a fairy tale, a mythological story.

Q: *I want to go back and ask a question about the themes or problems your films present. In* La dolce vita *you show experiences of the different directions in a man's life that lead him to an orgiastic experience at the end of the film, and you give us a resolution or an attitude, I think, about that orgy. In* Satyricon *you again show us an orgiastic experience. Perhaps both films had something to say which applied to our modern era. I'm wondering if in* Satyricon *you are rethinking the attitude and resolution you took towards the orgy in* La dolce vita? *Are you still satisfied with that resolution?*
F: What do you think, that you discovered a moralistic point of view?

Q: *I felt that in* La dolce vita *the man saw that the direction he was taking had led him to something—to this orgy—which he couldn't accept and now he was going to turn away from that. That that was his dead end.*
F: And in *Satyricon*?

Q: *Well, in* Satyricon *he went back to that same orgy.*
F: About orgies, I am always very enthusiastic. I hoped in *Satyricon* I would create the people with a more detached eye. So, it was my intention not to give or suggest any moralistic point of view.

Q: *When your main character looks up at the stars once in* Satyricon, *which is very reminiscent of the scene where Zampano looks up at the sky at the end of* La strada, *that image, I think, gives a moralistic feeling.*
F: But what do you see in *Satyricon*?

Q: *In* Satyricon *there's a scene where we look up at the stars through a roof.*
F: I don't see that I have done that. It's just a poetic moment I wanted to suggest. In this garden, where the two people have committed suicide, there are the people inside who go to look around the empty

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villa. It's a moment of suspension to show the nature around this villa. I do not recognize any other feeling—just to describe.

Q: *Tell me, is much of the picture shot on location?*
F: No, the picture is completely shot in the studio.

Q: *Even the ocean scenes?*
F: No. I don't think my producers would put the ocean in the studios. I wanted to make everything in the studio just because I think that an inventor must invent an atmosphere, something very realistic, and so to go on location, naturally, is something to disturb you if the picture has a rigor of re-creation. For that reason I wanted to do all of the sets in the studio.

Q: *Do you shoot out of sequence a lot, or at all?*
F: No, sequence shooting is not possible as any director of movies knows because there is a lack of money and time. But, I like to start with a sequence in the middle of the picture because one is obliged, in just beginning the picture, to give an explanation of a sequence that makes it richer. I think for myself it's psychologically a good thing not to follow chronologically the rhythm. I accept the production schedule.

Q: *Mr. Fellini, in what way do you think you are like and unlike Petronius, the author of* Satyricon*?*
F: This kind of ambiguity—of complicity and detachment in judgment and, in the same moment, to be the judge and the guilty together—I think is one of the components of Petronius. I recognize something of myself in this—to live and to write about life.

Q: *Both* 8½ *and* Juliet of the Spirits *seem to be derived very strongly from personal material. In* Satyricon, *were you purposely trying to move away from that?*
F: You want to say that *Satyricon* is not autobiographical? But I think it is absolutely impossible not to be autobiographical. I think that *Satyricon* is maybe much more autobiographical than even *8½*, because it is not an adapted biography. But maybe the anguish, the fear, the faith, the atmosphere that is in *Satyricon*—maybe that has to do with

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myself in a more immediate way. I think that the author of *Satyricon* is talking about his book in the same way.

Q: *The music in* Satyricon *was quite different than in the earlier films, I felt. Could you tell me a little about the procedure you followed?*
F: You want to talk about the music of the picture. I caused my musician a lot of trouble, you know, when I said to him for that picture we couldn't have music. We could have just music as atmosphere. So I listened, maybe, to five hundred records; I was very lucky, because a friend of mine has a discotheque, he has folklore, oriental, African records, so I had a lot of records, and I chose from those records just this kind of barbaric and Eastern sound. And I made just some melody in the beginning and the end.

Q: *When do you begin to work with the composer? At what period in the picture?*
F: Sometime before we start. I like to have some tapes of music because I like music when I work. And so it helps because it is another little piece of the body of the picture that you put in your studio so you start to become more familiar. The music is a big help, always, because it puts you in a strange dimension in which your fantasy stimulates you. Sometimes, as soon as I finish a picture, I show the picture to Nino Rota and we work very strictly and I tell him exactly what I wish, what I want, and we go to work with the piano and the moviola.

Q: *When did you have the theme for* La strada*?*
F: The theme from *La strada* was created by Nino Rota. He brought it to me. One day he said to me, "Do you want this?"

Q: *Did you have it when you were shooting?*
F: No, when I was shooting I had another one. Another theme, but it was not original. It was very sad and elegant.

Q: *How much editing happens as you film? Is the picture put together from week to week by your editor, or do you tend to wait?*
F: For the first picture, I was more pretentious, I wanted to cut and I wanted to do everything. I didn't want to miss anything. But, going on

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in years, I prefer to leave the cutter to his work. But, I don't want to see what he is doing as I shoot. Because, you know, the picture that you make is not entirely the picture that you have in mind. So if I'm going to see what I'm doing day by day, I start to see that the picture is becoming a little bit different. And the day after, when I am going to shoot, I think of the things I have seen, not of what I am making. So I prefer to separate the work.

Q: *So, you don't see your rushes?*
F: No. That is a great preoccupation for the producers.

Q: *Now you have made two or three films in color. How do you feel about working in color since you have made these films? Against black and white? How do you feel now?*
F: I feel well.

Q: *I read that you had felt that people could add their own color to a film. If your film was in black and white, people would not remember, but would add their own color.*
F: Ah yes, that's true. I did feel like that, you know, but it is very difficult to be faithful for your entire life. I have some idea of stories and the pictures that I have not yet done that I insist I am obliged to see in black and white! You know, it is very difficult now to make a picture in black and white, because TV wants pictures in color; so you have to make a picture with a very low budget.

Q: *How about the shape of the screen? In* La strada *you used a more normal aspect ratio. I believe* Satyricon *is in Panavision.*
F: Technical things sometimes have to be accepted. I don't agree to remain faithful to the old size. I like to change. Is that what you mean?

Q: *Yes. Earlier you spoke about some kind of state of infantile imagination that preceded the actual mathematical precision in putting together your film. I wonder if you could talk about any changes you find in your perceptions of the world around you and your relationships with people during the time that you are going through that kind of creative phase.*
F: This is complicated. It is impossible to answer in a schematic way. It is just maybe a trick of innocence or it is just to know better. The

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history of four months', five months' shooting is not only the private story of the director making the picture, but it is also a story of a picture trip, of mutual relationships, of love, of enemies, of vanity. So everything has to do with the picture you are making because everything that is happening is happening under this kind of atmosphere. So, I think I am helped by everything. Everything gives some stimulation that has to do with the particular atmosphere of this particular picture. It is just to live together. So I think the picture is more a lesson of morality, first of all. Just to try to take the time to acknowledge what is around you and what you are.

Q: *If I am correct, I believe, you are one of the few directors in the world today who doesn't look at rushes. I think you are almost totally alone, and I think it is important to point out to everyone that this is the way you behave because I think it is the answer to being creative, that you must free yourself every day and that you are not constantly being self-conscious about things you are doing, that you leave things behind each day and go on to the next day's shooting.*

F: One never does what he wishes; he does what he can, so I am obliged to do what I can and I am conditioned to say that I am doing what I wish. If I go to see what I have done, I see only what I can do, so it distracts me. I prefer to go on like a blind man, following with the imagination of the picture to delude myself that I am going in this direction.

Q: *Mr. Fellini, your camera moves are quite fantastic. When you have very complicated camera movements, have you thought it all out before you get on the set so they can do it quickly, or do you begin on the set?*

F: Yes, you know, technical things are involved, one has to know technique, one is born with technique. I never think during the night what I am shooting the day after. I mean, I never think consciously. Certainly I live always in the picture, I am not a director who is looking to find the shot, looking in the camera. I have no problem in this sense. The camera is just my eye. The thing has to work anyway. Certain kinds of movement have to be decided, certainly. There is a necessity to understand techniques. Another thing, it is very difficult for me to talk when I am outside a picture because it is a particular atmosphere when you are out. It is difficult to remember well what you are doing exactly. Anyway, I can say that I am not a movie director who consciously plots the

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movements of the camera, because they are very natural. The picture is in your head, in your imagination, everything, and I try to make it.

Q: *Could you say something, in conclusion, about what many have called a crisis in the cinema, from the point of view of consumer or popular demand versus artistic product?*

F: It is difficult for me to talk about a crisis in cinema. I have always been free to create my own film stories in images and feel that I am just at the beginning of this experience with plans to create many other screen stories, characters, situations, and backgrounds. All this prevents me from demonstrating alarm about the consumer upheaval in motion pictures.

Changing taste in cinema is not a serious problem. For years, there has always been a little man behind the creative film director to pop the question, "But will the public understand?" This attitude is shared by TV programmers whose yardstick is, "We must think about the shepherds in Sardinia."

The problem of audience acceptance is practically nonexistent. Without confidence in the public, film product becomes diminished, incomprehensible, and soporific. If a film author has something to say, he should have the opportunity to say it fully and sincerely. It might sound like rhetoric, but it is fundamental in a time of rapidly changing ideas and consumer tastes.

In this period of vertiginous change, even the traditionally accepted spectator mentality level of twelve to thirteen years is no longer what it was in the past. The spread of knowledge is infinitely greater and the number of taboos being toppled, infinitely higher. The challenge of uncertainty is a creative stimulant. It keeps me fit and young. It should also counteract man's predisposition to hang on to four or five fixed ideas through a whole lifetime.

The cinema is a house of miracles and in the present crisis of motion pictures, this vision could come into its own. The moment is certainly opportune to reform old cinema traditions and structures. For one, the organization of alternative exhibition circuits for personal films could leave the commercial circuits intact and dramatically encourage the growth of film audience maturity.

The reconversion of cinemas into smaller two-hundred to four-hundred seat houses would restore the aristocracy of filmgoing and

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modify the prevailing atmosphere in big cinemas of participating collectively as in a soccer game.

In examining the elephantine structure of cinema in this period of crisis, the role of the motion picture producer appears obsolete. Particularly in Italy, many producers are only intermediaries who more often than not merely propose a director's name and a property for the major companies in New York, acting as financiers and distributors. I think that the function of a self-named producer, entitled to a generous part of the budget for his limited activity as intermediary, is no longer indispensable.

The film author should be his own producer with a staff including an expert production executive and a good international lawyer—both fully dedicated to the film project.

In my experience, film producers have come to me with offers to direct sequels of the original project they had once turned down. Eleven producers refused to back me for *La dolce vita* but they were on the phone to propose *Dolce vita '65* or *Dolce vita '70*, unless it happened to be *The Daughter of Gelsomina* (*La strada*) or *Sons of the Vitelloni*.

The producer is an authoritarian figure who risks nothing, presumes to know public taste, and always wants to change the end of the film. If the film is a hit, he makes even more money while the film author receives nothing in addition. Personally, I am still subjected to the fascination of the producer as a boss or "padrone." For many years, my conflicts with producers have at least obligated me to keep my work in sharp definition against their spurious judgments, betrayals, and clumsy interference. But it also helped me generate an extra measure of energy to keep going.

The American companies are approaching direct contact with the film author. Representatives of these companies feel more comfortable today developing projects with us, but the big executives in New York are less wary of the producer and prefer to make their deals with him.

Cinema is the only art form that can penetrate the hallucinating mutation of mankind in contemporary times. It is the only medium of authentic cultural expression. It is also the medium to liberate man's fantasy and emotions. This is the cinema that is now free to emerge from the crisis of change.

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Federico Fellini: An Interview

CHARLES THOMAS SAMUELS/1971

THIS INTERVIEW IS IN THREE PARTS. Session one took place at Rome's Grand Hotel, to which Mario Longardi, Fellini's publicity manager for *Roma,* invited me to lunch. Eager to meet the director, I arrived at the hotel ten minutes before my appointment, but suspecting that Fellini would like to arrange the scene before my entrance, I decided to stroll about so as to come in a bit late. Outside, I enjoyed the spectacle of Fellini barreling up to the Grand parking lot in a long green Mercedes; inside, there was his ample figure towering over the crowd and hovering above some rum concoction that looked like a Felliniesque version of what millionaires drink in the tropics. "Ah," he said, "you're the journalist I'm supposed to meet." Next, he waved aside my assertion that I was a professor by handing me his drink. Finding that I liked it, he ordered replicas for his assembled colleagues, who were introduced as someone who would correct his English, someone who would correct his errors, and someone who would correct his lies. "If that isn't enough," he assured me, "we can bring others from the studio."

Fellini would clearly prefer not to be interviewed. While he looks about the lounge, rises to acknowledge the presence of various friends, and generally disports himself like the King of Rome I have later occasion to call him, I try to ingratiate myself with his troupe, hoping

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S: *Why?*

F: You might as well ask my why I didn't become a surgeon. In a certain sense, however, I am a literary man. The exigencies of production require me to write down what I intend to do, not only for myself, but to instruct my co-workers. I must tell the set designer about the world which the actors will inhabit, must send notes to the wardrobe mistress, must even keep records of what the film costs. I started my career writing story ideas for other directors, but now that is only the necessary first step in clarifying my own conception and thus of bringing me closer to making a film. A story idea merely fires the furnace, and a screenplay merely instructs the various sectors that must work to produce a film.

S: *Did you become a director rather than a writer because you enjoy that audience response which the writer never sees?*

F: But directors don't see it either.

S: *You can go into the theater, as you must certainly have done—*

F: No.

S: *Never?*

F: Occasionally, I've accompanied a film to a festival or a premiere, but I've always felt distracted and detached. A film's success with the public doesn't concern me. I made the film I had to. Then it becomes a prostitute, lives a commercial life; what it does for the public is the public's business. Working for the public doesn't interest me. I think that my films are produced by a wholehearted sense of vocation.

S: *In* Variety Lights—

F: We're still on *Variety Lights*?

S: *I'm afraid we've only begun. In* Variety Lights, *you show the theater with obvious love, but you also ridicule it. This is common in your films. It's as if while photographing a beautiful woman you showed her dirty feet.*

F: But the dirty feet are also beautiful. I try to love everything in life, not only what we usually consider proper, honest, charming. I always like to show both sides of a thing.

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S: *So you show both sides of the theater because they both exist?*
F: They exist together. The ideal and disillusioning sides of theater are two faces of a single truth. Both represent man.

S: *In the process, though, you deglamorize theater. For example, if we think of* Children of Paradise—
F: That film by Truffaut?

S: *No, Carné. Films like that glamorize theater; you want to present show business.*
F: I don't want to do anything. I never ask myself about my goals, and if I asked and answered, what good would it do? That's the critics' and public's business. For me, the important thing is not to know why I do something but simply to do it.

S: Variety Lights *also gives us our first example of something more obvious in your later films: the Fellini parade. Why are you so fond of showing actors walking in parade formation?*
F: There is no answer that would satisfy you. I could invent ten answers, but if you want something sincere—

S: *Perhaps the answer is—*
F: If you know, why do you ask me?

S: *I want to hear whether you agree. At the beginning of* The Clowns *you present yourself as a little boy watching the circus. Couldn't this love of parades have that origin?*
F: I don't know. An artistic creation has its own needs which present themselves to the author as indispensable. You're playing a game. If you are drawn to this type of cocktail party analysis, and if you have goodwill and some intuition, you can discover the reasons, but what good does it do? If I wanted to, I could explain that when I show a parade, I am showing the façade of life, people displaying themselves, etc.

S: *That's interesting.*
F: But it's not true.

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S: *It's interesting even if it isn't true—to someone who wants to understand how you see your own work.*
F: More likely, the truth of the matter is this: The sequence in question forces you to accept it nonrationally because you sense that artistic fatality that is independent of any explanation.

S: *There's a wonderful scene in* Variety Lights—
F: More *Variety Lights*!

S: *I'm sorry, but—*
F: We're making this a long lunch.

S: *—there's a scene between a cowboy and a Negro jazz musician that is not, strictly speaking, necessary to your story. Why did you include it?*
F: I really don't remember the film.

S: *It's a good film.*
F: That's nice, because I made it. Certainly, I agree with you, but—

S: *In this scene, and others, each character speaks his native language. This isn't usual in films.*
F: He was an American Negro; therefore, he spoke English.

S: *Usually a director, aiming his film at an audience of compatriots, has everything spoken in the native language.*
F: Often I mix languages to express the truth of a situation.

S: *You've said that all your films have the same theme and seem so alike to you that you can't even say which you prefer. But I've noticed more specific similarities: in situation and images. For example, in* Variety Lights, *there is a scene in a piazza where a gypsy—*
F: Plays a guitar.

S: *Right. Slightly altered, that scene reappears in* The White Sheik *when the fire-eater performs in the piazza. The finale of the orgy in* La dolce vita *takes the form of Marcello riding on a woman as if she were an animal. This also takes place in the nightclub scene of* Variety Lights. *There is the famous*

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sea beast in La dolce vita *and another in* Satyricon. *I could go on. Why do you repeat these things?*

F: There is no answer. A film takes form outside your will as a constructor; all genuine details come through inspiration. And what do we mean by inspiration? The capacity for making direct contact between your unconscious and your rational mind. When an artist is happy and spontaneous, he is successful because he reaches the unconscious and translates it with a minimum of interference. Unfortunately, we all make mistakes because education, culture, personal tics, and personal taste deform things that otherwise would be pure and instead mark them with the taints of our conditioning. The transformation from dream to film takes place in the awakened conscious state, and it's clear that consciousness involves intellectual presumption which detracts from creativity. Thus, an artist who realizes a dream always senses a diminishment.
I don't remember the specific question you asked me, but in any case, whenever you ask me why I did this, that, or the other thing, I can only answer that this particular moment brought me that perspective, light, words, characters, face. If the question interested me and I remembered, I might be able to answer when it concerns my sense of craftsmanship, but that is all. This answer takes care of all my work, eh?

S: *I'd like to continue discussing your assertion that realizing the idea diminishes it.*

F: Yes. I think, for example, that Nervi's idea of a bridge must have been more beautiful than the bridge he finally designed; he thought of Bridge and only built a bridge. That "a" sets limits on an idea that was originally unlimited. An image in the unconscious is not framed; it has the fascination of the vague and indefinite, of the inexpressible. This obscurity makes it more exciting. But when you realize the idea, you take away the mystery, the imprecision that makes things more than just themselves. The authentic, happy artist is one who maintains some sense of the arcane.

S: *By your definition, which of your films diminished its original conception least?*

F: The one I am making—but I really don't know. I never see my films again and therefore can't give a judgment.

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explains that the porter is off. He also tells me that he didn't want to appear "precious" at the Grand but that he has given so many interviews he feels like a fool, always saying the same things. I insist that I will get him to say new ones, but he tells me I can't. Then, as if to make sure my spirits are dampened, he informs me that "another journalist" will attend the meeting, adding to the annoyance of his constant and—as the transcript shows—deliberate mistake about my profession, the uneasiness I feel about the presence of an eavesdropper. I remind Fellini that this is *my* interview, and he assures me that "the other journalist" has come along to record what he says about *Roma*, the film in progress. As things turn out, we never get that far.

S: *What did Antonioni contribute to* The White Sheik*?*
F: If I remember correctly, Antonioni made a short about the sentimental side of the *fumetti*. I forgot its name.

S: *L'amorosa menzogna.*
F: Then he wrote a story for Ponti, which he was going to direct, and Ponti called me and Pinelli to turn it into a screenplay. There really was no contribution by Antonioni to *The White Sheik* except for that original contract with Ponti. We gave Antonioni screen credit, but actually we never even saw him.

S: *Do you see any point of similarity between his films and yours?*
F: I have seen very few of his films. We share the same passion, the same lack of reserve, the same sense of authentic vocation.

S: *I think most viewers would agree that your films are more Italian than his.*
F: According to you! I never give judgments about colleagues. An artist can no more judge another artist than one child can judge other children. Each artist has his particular vision. You can't wear someone else's glasses; they would fit badly, and you wouldn't see. The artist's glasses only work when they are put on nonartists, whom they move, exalt, surprise. Of course, sometimes private and esoteric material becomes part of a more general discourse. It's clear that Joyce is

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appreciated by other artists because his vision of the world is marked by that neurosis, conflict, and unhappiness which all artists share.

S: *When* The White Sheik *was first presented, it failed. Why?*
F: It's ingenuous to ask an author to justify his failures. He can always find many reasons.

S: *Let me suggest one. The film is too satiric about Italian life.*
F: That's a sensible justification because it doesn't require me either to mortify myself or to offer inflated excuses. Perhaps the film was ahead of its time. It's an ironic story and Italians don't like irony—sarcasm and buffoonery, but not irony. [Aside.] Listen how he makes me talk!

S: *Do you think that you made your subsequent films more tender in part because of your experience with* The White Sheik*?*
F: I had no experience; experience never teaches me anything. I have always been reproached for my caricatures, deformity, grotesqueness.

S: *In* The White Sheik *one first sees a marked characteristic of your work: fast cutting. For example, at the beginning—*
F: [On phone.] Hello. Oh, hello, Valentina. How are you? . . . Good. Listen, come to Fregene today. Listen, Valentina, are you awake? Are you absolutely sure you're awake? . . . If you like to come. . . . Okay, at four thirty I'll pick you up at the Hotel de la Ville. . . . Good-bye, baby. Good-bye. She's half-drugged, dreaming . . . an actress. One has such blurred conversations that you have to cut them short. Ours is a truly bestial cinema world, so confused that you can never meet its like anywhere.

S: *Back to* Juliet of the Spirits. *When Juliet puts on her makeup—*
F: You can't ask an author why he put an adjective in a sentence.

S: *Some authors do answer.*
F: I'm one who doesn't.

S: *If you don't want to, you obviously don't have to.*
F: You have to realize, my dear friend, that all artists aren't alike.

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S: *I'm perfectly aware of that, and—*
F: Poe wrote an essay telling—conceitedly—exactly how he wrote "The Raven." If you ask me how I shot a particular scene, I can answer for three days with a pack of nonsense. There is only one answer; I had to shoot it that way.

S: *I don't think so. [Fellini curses.] It's interesting for other people to learn what you thought you were doing.*
F: What use is all that? Of course, let's continue talking. I answer because I agree that you are right in the sense that my answers are also me. But practically speaking, everything you do to translate an irrational fact into an image diminishes . . . tends to deform . . . [Knock at the door.] Who's there? [The maid enters.] *Madonna mia.* What do you want? I don't need you. Didn't I tell you to leave me in peace today? . . . Look, everything that seeks to clear up an obscure process is totally academic. You only invent categories. I do things, and then I forget them. I seem to recall there is a hurried effect in the scene you speak of, but that is because Juliet realizes that her husband is coming home and is in a hurry to make herself up for him. So the cuts mirror her agitation.

S: *But even in the* Satyricon, *when there isn't such an explanation. . . .*
F: Where?

S: *At the beginning, for example, we see Ascyltus crawling on the floor of the baths and the camera moves.*
F: The shots in the *Satyricon* are fixed.

S: *But the effect is of flying. . . .*
F: That's because you saw it on a moviola.

S: *I saw it in a theater.*
F: The shots are fixed to suggest a lost world contemplated through a series of frescoes.

S: *All right. Why then do you impose movement by having Ascyltus crawl back and forth while delivering his lines?*

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F: I wanted to give immediately a sense that he was an animal that could not be restrained. So he was naked, perspiring, moving on the floor—with muscles like something alive. What a question anyway; really crazy! Look at all this heap of questions he has prepared!

S: *At the end of* The White Sheik, *the Catholic Church becomes the ultimate spectacle. The characters run off to St. Peter's as if they were going to a movie.*

F: Of course. Seen from the perspective of Ivan Cavalli and his relatives, the church is a spectacle, like the Colosseum or the Quirinal, something to tell others about back in the provinces.

S: *And the church always fails to do anything worthwhile in your films. For example, in 8½, when Guido's producer asks him to visit the cardinal for technical advice, all the man does is recite some ridiculous words of Diomedes.*

F: Well?

S: *Is this what you think of the church: that it always fails?*

F: My feeling about the church is so clear: a reaction against my education that nevertheless bears fruit. Even going to prison can be a precious, necessary conditioning for a creative nature. Tyranny, slavery, superstition—all those things that tend to restrain the vital instinct—provoke in a creative nature an opposite response. While reacting, he may become a bit deformed because his stimulus is oppression, but he is always liberated in another direction. When an artist—I use this word too often, but what should I say. . . . A plumber? . . . Okay, when a plumber. . . . No. The animosities of a creative nature are only pretexts to stimulate his creativity. An authentic or serious artist—and when I say "artist," I mean only a certain kind of individual of a certain psychological type—when an artist exhibits antipathies, he is not to be wholly identified with them. One artist needs antipathies; another, ideology; another, love; another, memory. Depending on the season and his temperament, every artist needs one or another of these things simply as a pretext that will fire his creative furnace. You understand, I am speaking only of real artists, men of personal vision. For such men, after it has been used to create a work of art, an idea is used up. They can then use a totally opposed idea so long as it will inspire another fantasy.

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about Stanley Kramer. While shooting *The Secret of Santa Vittoria*, that director had been infuriated when he heard a slight unplanned noise in the streets. According to Fellini, Kramer then dispatched "a troupe of SS men," but their efforts uncovered only a woman frying an egg. Fastidiousness that stops a whole company because of a slight sizzle, Fellini finds absurd. "Film is only images," he says, "You can put in whatever sound you want later and change and improve it."

In his office we are, as before, interrupted by phone calls (though none as suggestive as those I transcribed), and I am beginning to feel not only exasperated but as tired as Fellini, who continually yawns. After a while, however, he shuts off the phone—to my relief—and becomes, I believe, more yielding.

S: Il bidone *was intended for Humphrey Bogart. Were you satisfied with Broderick Crawford?*

F: I thought of Bogart because the confidence man who told me the story looked like him: the same dry wolfish face, a face desperate with the knowledge he would end badly. I always have models in my mind. So at the beginning, I say I will use Mae West and the Marx Brothers for the *Satyricon* as part of my quest for the ideal faces that will realize my characters. But by the time I started shooting *Il bidone* Bogart was sick, so I used Crawford.

S: *Why do you always use the same music in your films?*

F: Because all have the same author, story, atmosphere. Moreover, Nino [Rota] writes the music in my company. It is a harmonious collaboration that I haven't felt like changing. His music is a kind of frame that is very true for my story and images.

S: *In* Il bidone *you give the first of many pictures of corrupt middle-class life. But I'm struck, for example, at the party that Basehart and Masina attend, that you can't think of anything more squalid than those men who ask the girl to strip so that they can see if she's wearing falsies.*

F: You want something more corrupt; that's your problem. I don't want to shock. I only want to be true to the story I'm telling.

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S: *Why did you revive the character of Cabiria after* The White Sheik*?*
F: Because I liked her nocturnal vagabond spirit that is so typical of Rome.

S: *But she is different in the two films, don't you think?*
F: A little. In *The White Sheik* she was a minor character: a night spirit in love with flame. In *Nights of Cabiria* she became something larger: a woman in love with love.

S: *I am disturbed about the film's ending. François Périer seems so sincere, so true, until the last scene when he dons dark glasses. Why didn't you give earlier signs of his villainy?*
F: There are signs: that toothpick he keeps in his mouth, and his face and neck—those of a Robespierre. You are an American, innocent like all Americans. A European sees immediately that he is no good: the way he talks, the saccharine insistence, the exaggerated timidity behind which he hides, that mustache, those moles on his skin that give him the look of a rat.

S: *Why do you show the family that buys Cabiria's house just before she goes to get married?*
F: They are other wretches who will fill the house with their own misery and desperation.

S: *Her reaction to them is important.*
F: She feels that they are invaders, mice and weasels to whom the house has been sold. She is like children who say yes and then change their minds.

S: *One of the great touches in the film is the mascara that runs down her face in the final close-up. Was that planned?*
F: Everything is planned. Making a film is like putting an astronaut in space.

S: *Don't you ever improvise?*
F: No. "Improvisation" is an offensive term to an artist. I don't improvise; I try to keep myself open to all suggestions, to all changes that occur while the film is growing day by day. When I start a film, I know

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where I want to end up because I have already gone through all those evocations and that magic which cause a fantasy to take shape. But after the first two or three weeks a film assumes its own will, face, and voice; it becomes a different person whom I do not know until I begin to make it. Therefore, if I tried to be strictly faithful to all my original plans, I would confine the film. I prepare everything, more than is necessary, but then I want the film to grow and tell me itself what I must do. This is not improvising; this is humble service to a creature of one's own who is growing and has its own needs. When you start the film, you don't yet know what the faces will look like or how much the props will weigh. I can write a three-page scene which is very beautiful and then suddenly discover that a certain light accomplishes all that those three pages did. I don't improvise; my films grow as part of a vital process. There are other methods: I think that Hitchcock couldn't do as I do since his films are manufactured with the precision of a Swiss watch. Mine are different.

S: *When you edit a film, do you do much revising?*
F: No, because I film with a pretty clear idea of what I need. It's rare for a shot of mine to be cut from the final print.

S: *In* La dolce vita *when Sylvia and Marcello are in the Trevi fountain, the water is shut off. Why?*
F: It is a trick of dramaturgy.

S: *Are you upset by those who argue that this action symbolizes an aborted moment of sexual contact?*
F: Everything in life is symbolic. At this moment, I also wanted that silence, that moment of suspension between them.

S: *Do you think that Steiner is a convincing intellectual?*
F: In Rome there are many such theatrical intellectuals. And not only Italians are this way. Look at Norman Mailer.

S: *He'd like to be thought an intellectual, but he isn't one.*
F: So much the better for him.

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he is not thinking of responsibility, to have every other woman in the world without angering his wife?

F: *8½* is also a comic film. Next to the camera I placed a card on which I had written, "Remember, this is a comic film."

S: *The fantasies in the film are either memories (like the scene in which he is put to bed) or wish fulfillment (as in the Turkish bath), but in the latter he fantasizes something that I find difficult to accept as his wish: the revolt of his harem.*

F: That comes from his sense of the practical. I show what would happen if his dream were fulfilled. Since he is not an Oriental caliph but rather an Italian Catholic, his dream isn't spontaneous but only a response to frustrations built up in him by his Jesuit upbringing. Therefore, his dream carries its own punishment. For that reason, the sequence quickly changes from joy to sorrow.

S: *Are you using the critic in the film to raise all the objections that the audience might raise?*

F: Not the audience; other critics.

S: *So you're trying to prevent the critics from having power over our response?*

F: No. That critic represents an intellectual who is rarefied, unvital, stifling. Also, for a creative nature like Guido's, criticism is profoundly foreign. He cannot accept that mentality and so has to kill it. Otherwise, he would not be able to give full vent to his fantasies, his world of games and marvels.

S: *But there is a critic inside you, too, isn't there?*

F: Yes, and once in a while I stab him. I am a builder, and building involves both intuitive and rational operations; but I have to reach an equilibrium. I know all the categories, and I must choose; but choosing means judgment, which delimits things. I need that critical sense that selects, eliminates, and chooses by taking account of my experience.

S: *Doesn't a critic do the same thing—even though he doesn't create films or plays but merely writes about them?*

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F: I don't know. The critic merely by saying, "I am a critic," inflates himself and causes himself to see not what exists but what he thinks ought to exist. But things are only what they are. Therefore, the critic is usually mistaken. A truly humble critic would look at things from the inside, not from the outside. If the thing is vital and you look at it from your external point of view, you will never understand but will only project onto it what you think it should be.

S: *Not necessarily. And even when the critic is trying to posit corrections, he doesn't refer to himself as such but rather to his experience of what other artists have done in a similar situation.*

F: Just as bad. When a critic tells how the work should be according to his taste, which has been formed by a certain culture and certain artists, he is still judging by what is congenial to him. That is totally alien to me.

S: *Not totally. You are very concerned about critics. You are hostile to them, but they crop up in your films, even in* The Clowns. *There is a scene in which you and a critic sit discussing the film, only to be covered by overturned pails.*
F: He's not a critic; he's just a newspaperman.

S: *But he is raising a critical question: "What does this mean?"*
F: It's a stupid question.

S: You *consider it stupid. Why don't you leave it alone then? Why do you keep creating characters who put this question to your alter ego so that you can debunk it? If it's so clearly stupid to you, why don't you just ignore it?*
F: Because my pictures are also about stupidity.

S: *Who is the girl in white in* 8½*?*
F: She is the most disturbing sign of Guido's impotence, and he projects through this figure all his own confusions, his desire for an ideal woman who would tell him, both as man and artist, what to do; she is his nostalgia, his childish desire for protection, his romanticism. These all are embodied in a figure who mocks him because she is only an abstraction.

S: *In another episode showing Guido's relations with women, are we to find La Saraghina sexy or funny or both?*

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F: She is sex seen by a child. Hence she is grotesque, but also seductive to one so innocent.

S: *Later, when the priests berate him for watching La Saraghina, he is brought before his mother in the seminary. Why does she wipe one eye and keep the other open?*
F: She is trying to see whether or not Guido is contrite.

S: *She is hypocritical?*
F: No. She is controlling. She wants to see that her exaggerated desperation has an effect on the child. But since the boy is intelligent, he remembers his mother as being a bit hypocritical here.

S: *Later he goes to confession. When he departs, you hold on some decoration in the confessional booth. Why?*
F: It is a horror, a big ghost, a black bird.

S: *Let's pass on to* Juliet of the Spirits. *It seems to me similar to Bergman's* Hour of the Wolf—
F: I made my film first.

S: *I know, but I'd like to compare them. Have you seen Bergman's film?*
F: Yes. He showed it to me when he came to Rome. Its fantasy is completely different from mine, more Nordic. I would call *Hour of the Wolf* Bergman's *8½*. Indeed, he confesses candidly that he has seen all my films and cites them in his own. Being a rich, an authentic artist, he can borrow from others without being guilty of plagiarism. I value Bergman. He is a real man of spectacle and images, one of the best.

S: *Why was there so long an hiatus between* Juliet *and your next film?*
F: I had written the scenario for a film that would have been my most beautiful ("The Voyage of Mastorna"), but through a mysterious series of circumstances, I never was able to make it. I got sick, for a long time. You know, it's good sometimes to fall sick because illness ruptures the daily routine and forces you to think about things in a new way. One imagines he will always be vital and active. Suddenly, there comes a pause. As a result, new fantasies emerge.

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S: *Why did the new fantasy become "Toby Dammit"?*
F: Why, why, why! I was still under contract with De Laurentiis to make "Mastorna" and so was in total confusion. Then along come these French producers who beg me to participate in a multi-episode film, although I have never agreed to work with anyone else. But they assured me that of the three stories, I would make one, Bergman another, and Welles the last. So I said yes. Then it turned out that they had lied about Bergman, and Welles, who didn't trust them, refused to sign. I continued anyway, simply because this was a way of freeing myself from De Laurentiis. When they told me my partners were to be Malle and Vadim, I could have legally refused. With me, Welles, and Bergman—three visionary artists whose images have richness of meaning—there would have been some common quality in this homage to Poe. That's why I signed; not for monetary considerations. But you see, I was emerging from a period of crisis; I was overwhelmed with troubles, had not worked for two years. I could have broken the contract, but that didn't seem right. So I proceeded. And now I am glad I did because, although I'm not able to judge my own work, because I never see it when it is finished, I think this film is perhaps my most representative.

S: *I agree, and that's why I'd like to ask several questions about it. First, where did you get the idea of characterizing the devil as a young girl?*
F: In Poe's story, which, as you know, was only my jumping-off point, the devil is a man with a black cape and a beard. I didn't like that; it seemed too eighteenth century to me. Moreover, I thought this was the wrong kind of devil for a drugged, hippie actor. His devil must be his own immaturity—hence, a child.

S: *She is infantile but also terribly knowing. Did you feel that you put into the film some of your own ideas about success?*
F: No.

S: *Not even in the interview sequence?*
F: In the interview I reflected my sense of the uselessness of this procedure. Excuse me, have you found that I'm the only director with such a negative attitude about it?

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S: *Many have your feeling, but none so strongly. When Toby enters the airport, we see many fantastic things going on. There is an ugly man pawing a cowboy, a girl standing at a bar next to a sort of Fu Manchu, etc. Why do you fill the background with such grotesque figures?*
F: The airport in Rome is like that. Furthermore, this is all seen from a drugged perspective.

S: *Why don't you tell us why Toby sold his soul?*
F: You're asking too much from a short episode.

S: *During the drive through Rome, there are sometimes sets and sometimes real objects. For example, the bus going under the aqueduct is a painted flat.*
F: I do this sort of thing very often.

S: *Why?*
F: Because I like to joke. It makes the image disquieting. And the whole tale is meant to have that effect: a drive toward death. Even that cowboy you mentioned has a mask on his face. These are all small tricks.

S: *One of the tricks I'd like to ask you about concerns the head of Terence Stamp at the end of the film. It seems so phony. . . .*
F: The film is make-believe.

S: *I feel the need of something stronger there.*
F: Why, isn't that head frightening?

S: *No. Nor is it frightening in the* Satyricon *when Alain Cuny's head is cut off and falls into the sea. That image is marvelous, but it seems to me to be adulterated when the body hits the deck and the top of the torso is obviously wax.*
F: That's because you saw it a hundred times on a moviola.

S: *No, I saw it once in a theater.*
F: Actually, we really cut the head off but since we had two takes and Cuny had only one head. . . .

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the child its final push and life's breath, giving it the heartbeat like Frankenstein sucking up stellar energy, and despite the fact that I still identify with it completely in all its molecules, I now feel it plopping out of me, inexorably and forever. The life-giving has now occurred.

Then there comes this moment of perception, of clarity: you have done your best, have protected it, wanted it, guided it, controlled all its details, given it everything of yourself, programming its minutest elements, leaving nothing to chance, and suddenly it gets away from you. It is breathing on its own now. And from that moment on I feel no particular relation to it, no father-feeling. From this moment the life of this creature, this friend, this monster, this approximate form of life, interests me only little.

I would be lying to you if I said that I don't care how well it does outside, whether it makes its way, meeting friends, or what. It pleases me of course if it arouses sympathies. I prefer for it to walk than to collapse. But I no longer feel linked to it. This makes it hard for me to talk about it and to comment on it. It seems vaguely indecent to me to do so. And just because I am the one who made it. I don't have the feeling that I am really authorized to discuss it. Somehow at that point I feel I know it less well than others do.

B: *What a pity mothers don't usually have this kind of respect for their creations. We might have a world with more autonomous men in it, less achievement-oriented.*

F: Pure Hassidic wisdom . . . Today there are too many of us. That in itself makes us competitive and achievement-oriented. The profoundly religious relationship to life was possible when we lived in small tribes, in natural conditions. But what has happened has happened, man can never go back. Maybe some new forms of knowledge, systems of life lived in small groups, can be undertaken, but it seems to me that most people are not even interested in knowing, in changing, and in being involved in research. I realize more and more that the things that disturb us profoundly, that fill our being and cause obscure nostalgia in us, most people are ignorant of, and they want to stay that way. They don't want to be shaken up, trying to get them to listen is bothersome to them. You become a disturber of the peace, a bore.

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B: *The small tribe, living, as you say, in natural conditions, resembles the film crew, joined together by a common cause, and not shunning knowledge and involvement. The road from the breaking up of the tribe, via the left-over "tribe" called family, to the reductio-ad-absurdum of feminism, which is surely the last straw in the destruction of tribal bonds, seems to me to have been, in fact, the theme and common cause of your current film crew, in the making of* City of Women, *which shows what happens when these bonds are destroyed. The autonomization of the sexes, which in nature has never existed, is shown in your film to be a deadend street. Was that your intention in making it, to show this danger?*

F: I am very pleased by the fact that you see the film in this key. Making a film about a problem and not giving an answer to it—as obviously no artist can, especially in the cinema—makes the public always a bit uneasy. They expect some sort of resolution. They all seek certainty. And this search often keeps them from seeing the film for what it is, for what its maker intended. We want others to provide slogans, ideology translated into pills, to be taken with the meal. It has become bothersome to use one's own head, tiresome to measure and weigh one's own life all the time. And recently it has been called indecent to be concerned with the private sphere, we are forced to think of classes and groups . . . the annulment of the individual. . . . Look at the cult of youth: once the old had the respect of the tribe owing to their knowledge and experience, having overcome the years of fervor of instinct and the ferment of the blood, and they had an equilibrating influence. Today the old are regarded as being useless, especially in countries of development. It happens a little less in capitalist societies that have found maturity. Take England, where a man removed from productivity and strife can still find himself in controlling positions, at least not killed off at sixty-five.

B: *Why do you think I have chosen England to live?*

F: Is that a question or an answer? I guess we are all seeking refuge from the world's decline; some in work and some in moving . . . so you are leaving Rome?

B: *Well, I still have my apartment at the Pantheon, but I come here less and less. In the summer, especially, the noise and the rowdiness of the people*

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make it impossible. What bothers me most, is the growing lack of respect people have for each other and for traditions, ideas, values, and emotions. It gets to the point where even saying this puts you in a category to be derided. And one other thing I find hard to take: approximation and the lack of originality. Nobody does anything beyond the minimum necessary and nobody has any new thinking to offer. But I don't think Rome is unique in this respect . . . I see you nodding: may I say then, that your film is about this, about the decline of values and the disappearance of the human dimension in modern life? About the end of togetherness?

F: Certainly. And I am pleased that you suggest such a moving and at the same time alarming point of view. Because that is, in fact, how things really are. But at the same time I don't want the impression abroad that I made the film as a political platform. As you know, I have always refused this, because it seemed to me to be very limiting. I did not consider it right that my inclination to tell stories, my work in life, should be circumscribed by such a definition. But if by "political" we mean the demystification of the nonauthentic, the unmasking of lies, the support of the plurality of ideas, the refusal of rigid viewpoints, the respect for the liberty of others, the understanding that your liberty ends where that of another person begins, then I would say that all my films have been and are political.

B: *In previous ones, in the end, there was always a sort of mystical acceptance of the horror of his existence by the protagonist. The films didn't have real endings but projected hope for the idea of life. And there was a sense of equilibrium between the body of the film and its human drama on the one hand, and the end, a sort of religious hope for man. In this film, it seems to me, the scales are more weighed on the side of horror.*

F: In the end of *City of Women* the protagonist consciously accepts the fact that he is dreaming. Waking up in the train, and deciding to go back to sleep because reality is beginning to become upsetting again (he sees his wife in the seat previously occupied by the feminist, the feminist has become a sort of courtesan, the two terrorist soubrettes turn out to be student girls), he accepts to go back into the tunnel with the knowledge that he now has made a contact with his inner, profound, mythical being. This time he will dream because he is deciding to dream. It will be a vigilant dream, full of attention for the profound, a witnessing dream.

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He goes back consciously into the dream in order to have a more lucid contact with himself. Lucid and fascinated at the same time, passionate and yet with a sense of distance. Intentionally without intention—a phrase, I think, taken from the Tao or some Hassidic book, but I don't want to sound stupidly philosophic—he decides to continue his trip but with his eyes open upon the dream. In fact, the very last shot of the film, at the very end after the titles, which come up as the train is in the tunnel again, there are a few frames in which an opening, a far wink of light shows in the dark. The exit from the night of the tunnel. It is only twenty frames and the sound has abated by then, so I hope the projectionists of the world will not cut off my delicate hint (but I have not much hope for this) nor people get up to leave too early.

B: *So there is hope?*

F: Not exactly. Hope is a lugubrious word. I prefer to speak of faith. Since I am here, I must be having faith of some sort. In the film, the train doesn't come out of the tunnel, but there is that remote suggestion of light. How could one not have faith of some sort? After all, since I know nothing, Gideon, since we do not know why we are here . . . (this is getting to be the kind of talk that the *Vitelloni* used to engage in at one o'clock in the morning in their provincial café) . . . Faith derives from accepting the fact of one's total ignorance . . .

B: *Faith in mankind?*

F: Faith in oneself.

B: *Faith in your work?*

F: Don't you have it yourself? Here you are, interviewing me—don't you have faith in what you are doing?

B: *Not much. Partially it is a living, and partially an alibi. And only very deep down, in some remote part of myself, I believe that somewhere, somehow, somebody is actually going to read this and derive some benefit from it. Maybe two or three people, maybe a few more. But certainly not the masses. Making a film would be suicidal with this attitude, so I presume your faith goes further.*

F: But this is what faith is. To do something you believe in, in whatever way you normally do it. To do something that is yourself. To know that someone will read what you are doing now, will have an impression

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of the relationship you have with your friend Federico, of the thing you are creating that represents him and that represents yourself—the wish to say it, to write it, that is faith. And maybe we should feel some sort of joy, in a funny way, to be witnesses to what is happening around us.

B: *Where the women take Mastroianni to court in* City of Women, *he is asked: "Why did you choose to be born male?" Perhaps I could ask you: why did you choose to be born today? Not having had a choice in the matter would be the answer in both cases, but does that in itself impose a "making the best of it" attitude? In any case, faith in the doing doesn't necessarily mean faith in the utility of it.*

F: Well, what is there to do? What can anyone do? Concentrate on oneself, not in order to exclude relationships with others, but because only in yourself, in the end, can you find a meaning for your life, doing that which you know how to do, trying to defend it from all doubts and paralyzing perplexities, from all discomforts. Not being, by vocation, a revolutionary, this becomes my real revolution. To propose this view, it seems to me, is the most revolutionary approach. The only thing I can suggest, anyway. I cannot fail to believe in what I do. Even though I see that it is becoming ever more difficult to do it, even though I do, at times, feel ridiculous to demand the attention of a hundred persons, who, at my command, work to establish a certain, particular ray of light to illuminate the blond head of a woman, with that particular precision . . . but if I did not believe in this madness, in this mad insistence on detail, in this rigor, and if I did not demand of others to share this madness, then indeed I would disintegrate totally. This is my way of having faith in myself, and thus in what I do. One is forced to recognize, at the same time, one's own limits, and to learn how to act within them. And these are my limits. Beyond this, I make no pretense.

B: *And beyond the cinema?*

F: It appears to me that I have few interests beyond this thing. This container, this framework, which at times may appear to be suffocating and make you feel vaguely un-topical, provides a discipline and clarifies your limits, and by limits I do not mean the prison-aspect of stopping your movements but the energy-producing need to stay within a prescribed, creative stance. Only he who is in prison can talk of liberty

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Fellinissimo

GERMAINE GREER/1988

Before the start of his twenty-fourth film, the most Italian of directors reminisces, flatters, protests. Germaine Greer was in Rome to hear it all.

AN INTERVIEW CAN BE ONLY as good as the interviewer. When a writer who never interviews anyone and detests giving interviews herself interviews a subject who hates interviews as much as she does, the result is apt to be a noninterview. When I was asked to interview Federico Fellini for this magazine, I took it as an excuse to telephone him out of the blue after years of no communication beyond strange notes and postcards that I would send him from obscure corners of the earth. Once I was speaking to him on the telephone, it was already too late to withdraw.

"Germaine, how can you possibly imagine that I would refuse to do the interview? Can you seriously tell me that you thought I might say no?" When he is speaking to a woman Fellini's voice is always soft, insinuating, low-pitched, and never more effective than when he is using the telephone to maintain contact, perhaps the only contact, with an "*amica.*"

"But Federico, if it bores you and annoys you, then we shan't do it."

"You used not to be so disingenuous. How could it bore me to speak with my dear, *simpatica*, intelligent, good, sweet *amica*? How are you?"

Fellini asks the conventional question—*Come stai*?—with such a caressing inflection that one is tempted to answer it.

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Despite these heroic attempts to ward off the necessity of undergoing any more interviews, Fellini had agreed to go through the motions one more time, for *amicizia*.

The interview began badly. I wanted to push Fellini a little on his reading of Jung; to my horror he answered my preliminary question in the exact words of page 131 of *Intervista sul cinema*. If we were to continue in that vein, both of us would be dead of boredom in a day.

Fellini said to me a few days later, "When I was a journalist, I never knew how to ask the questions. And I wasn't interested in the answers. I was the ideal interviewer. That's the kind of interviewer I always hope to get, one like me." And that was what he got. I did not ask him questions to which I did not want the answers. Once or twice he said, "But you're not asking me any questions." Nevertheless, I have on tape fifteen hours of Fellini talking, talking about what interests him. It was a trade-off between prompts and stimuli from me and wonderfully developed free associations from him, a trade-off in which I had much the best of the bargain, for *amicizia*.

There is only one kind of friendship that a single woman can have with a Latin man. The very word "*amica*" in Italian implies "mistress." Every Latin man as thus defined is married and has a range of contacts resulting from his relationship with his wife which do not overlap with the contacts he makes outside the family circle. With all those business and pleasure contacts that are female, the Latin man ritually flirts. He considers it merely good manners to make love to unattached ladies and to attempt to seduce them. Much of what he is up to is bluffing, a bluff that is not meant to be called; the flirtation and its accompanying romantic fantasy can be prolonged as long as they continue to amuse both parties.

Any actual sexual liaison is apt to be short-lived, for the Latin man has not the slightest intention of humiliating, still less of abandoning, his wife, upon whom he is completely emotionally dependent. One reason for describing this syndrome is that this type of human being, *Homo sapiens latinus*, is a threatened subspecies soon to disappear from the face of the earth.

Fellini laughs when we talk of these things and says, "Do you think I am such an archetypal Latin man?" as if he weren't. When I was describing Plácido Domingo to him in just the terms I have used above,

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Fellini kept nodding his head in approval. "*Certo*," he said. "*Certo*. The Latin man stays on the threshold of reality. He postpones realization to an indefinite tomorrow because he prefers the dream, the fantasy. That is the great wrong done to us by the Catholic Church and at the same time the great protection that our religion gives us. It locks us into this phase of appetency, of excitement and desire."

"Federico, in your work you hold superstition, bigotry, and repression up to ridicule. You've even been denounced from the pulpit as a public sinner. Behind all the dreams and delusions of your character, there floats an ideal of liberation, of sexual liberation, I'd have thought."

"All things considered, I doubt liberation is such an auspicious thing. For an artist, it is essential to have restrictions, confines, limitations to struggle against. For a creative personality, unlimited options are dangerous. You have to come up against something ineluctable, a reality principle that gives a shape to the endless creations of your fantasy. My creativity has to coincide with an external destiny, the huge manufactory that is Cinecittà. My fantasy has to be communicable to others and has to submit to the discipline, the logistic demands of what is really a sort of military exercise, moving great masses of matériel and great numbers of people in a coordinated manner, day by day. I accept that discipline, although because the artist is always an adolescent, and a transgressor, I may murmur against it. I need my producer; his obtuseness, his *estraneità*, his outsider status are necessary to me."

"Yet, Federico, you could hardly claim to be such a heinous transgressor. You stay well within the confines of traditional heterosex, and there is nothing rapacious or violent in your fantasies. There is no preaching of revolution in your films."

Fellini is so innocent about politics that he was horrified when, as he was using the men's room at Cesarina's restaurant shortly after *Prova d'orchestra* was released in Italy, a man beside him said, as he buttoned up, "You are right, Maestro. What we need round here is dear old Uncle Adolf." Fellini laughs in astonishment as he remembers this. "'Zio Adolfo,' the man said, as if it were Father Christmas!"

Prova d'orchestra is a political film in the broadest sense; it enacts the strange disequilibrium in human creativity of which Fellini is himself a beneficiary. In the film the players attempt to do without the conductor,

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and the conductor in turn tries to humiliate and distance the players from his supernal vision. Players and conductor both are mocked, but the mockery becomes tragic when a wrecker's steel ball smashes through the wall of the rehearsal room. (We are all fiddling while the planet, our culture, and the social order are falling apart. Below my absurdly expensive hotel, the white travertine of the Spanish Steps is soiled with urine, excrement, and vomit. Once-beautiful Italian boys too weak to stand lie on the balustrades waiting for their dealers to come and shoot them up.) When Fellini says he is not interested in politics, he means that he will not play a role in the sectarian merry-go-round of Italian politics.

I met Federico Fellini the year he was making *Casanova;* the post of *amica,* though not satisfactorily filled (for it can never be satisfactorily filled; see *Otto e mezzo,* etc.), was not exactly vacant either. It seemed a better idea to me to conduct our friendship from a distance, if only because Fellini would never listen to me when I spoke to him, but whistled through his teeth and looked me up and down as if I were a racehorse he was about to buy.

The last time I wrote to Fellini was in 1984, after I had been to see *E la nave va* in the fourteenth-century Church of Santa Margherita in the Sicilian town of Sciacca. I thought he would enjoy the idea of *la* Germaine dressed in deep mourning (for her father) sitting on one of a hundred tubular steel chairs in the choir loft while the wall-eyed projectionist ran the film for her alone. The strangest thing was that the stone walls of the desanctified church, which has a fabulously beautiful arched portal carved with a pattern of stylized leaves, were covered with plywood on which vague stone shapes had been clumsily drawn freehand. Fellini did like my little anecdote, but if I had known how badly *E la nave va* had been distributed, I might not have sent my letter.

Fellini phoned my room from what he calls the "'all" and we would call the "foyer." Sunk in an armchair, he watched me stride past toward the desk and turn *contraluce* to see him. He looked just like Freddie Jones in *E la nave va,* for he has let a froth of silver hair grow on his neck and wears a narrow-brimmed hat plonked on his almost bald crown. If I was disconcerted by the change in him, I hope I had the presence of mind not to show it. He, of course, pretended that he saw no change whatever in me.

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"Federico, why do you always call me beautiful? I am not beautiful. I never was beautiful. If at any time I was beautiful, I'm certainly not beautiful now! It seems to be your sacred duty to tell me the thing that is not, as if you were trying to undermine my sanity."

Fellini's voice was tired. "The fact that a Latin man, and especially an Italian man, is naturally prompted towards that kind of gallantry is one of the traits that foreigners find most appealing about us Italians. And it makes them feel attractive, flattered."

The coldness of his answer was its best verification. The implication that foreigners are actually awkward and unattractive and need to be put at ease by elegant Italian hypocrisy struck me like a cold shower, but I soldiered on, as if trying to snare him in an outright antifeminist position.

"Do you think women need to be told they are beautiful?"

"I think it must be flattering and pleasing to hear oneself declared with more or less conviction to be a beautiful woman. Why should it be annoying to be called a beautiful woman?"

"How would you react if I called you a beautiful man?"

"I'd be a bit surprised."

"Just a bit?"

"Yes." Fellini often asks, "What do you like about me?" as a preamble to hearing some return for the hundreds of words of extravagant flattery that he bestows on pictures offered in the hope that there is a career in Cinecittà for these unknown Lollobrigidas and Lorens.

"I can hardly blame you, Federico, for showing women as fetishes in your films," I said as I looked through the file called "Shapely *signoras*"; others are called "cute" or "mysterious" or any of the dozens of Italian words that describe female carnality. "The world would think you a great booby, *amico mio*, if you didn't take advantage of such complaisant women."

"Truth is, I am *in gran parte* just such a booby. I am still in awe of women; I still feel that fascination, that conviction that women have some revelation to make to me that will transform my entire existence. Don't you find it stirring, moving, to see a woman who is aware and happy that she is admired?"

I was chastened to realize, as I sat sneering at the grotesque homemade pinups, that it was I who was applying too narrow a standard of

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situation. She had got it into her head that I hadn't done caca. We were in a dressmakers' workshop full of girls, some young, some not so young, all working away on treadle sewing machines, with billowing masses of colored material. My mother borrowed a potty from the proprietor, put it in a corner, and made me sit on it. There I was, sweating and straining, and I could hear the girls giggling, and it seemed to me that all that noise of the sewing machines was one huge female laugh at my expense. . . ."

This story is already transformed into a series of cinematic images; it would be a rash analyst who accepted it as an accurate transcript of actual experience. When I asked Fellini if he was sure that the potty drama had taken place, he laughed and said, "So that's how much credence you give to my *racconti*." He did not take my point, that children confabulate to fill the spaces left by traumas that they dare not remember. Another story of the absent mother provides even more reason to suspect that Fellini's physical relationships with women, starting with his mother, have never been easy.

"I'm telling you this story because I'm completely shameless and so that you can have something piquant to put in your article. I have never in my life eaten aubergines. I tried to eat aubergine torte once; I said to myself, 'After fifty, no, sixty years, how can you still be so blocked about aubergine?' I'm sure I could have eaten it, but when they brought it, I didn't want to. I didn't want to overcome this psychological block. You'll be wondering why. . . ." (Fellini asked himself "Why?" on my behalf.) "When I was seven or eight, we had a servant called Marcella. She was a big girl, very robust, with a really strong body odor. At midday, when the family was at the dinner table, she would sit on a chair in a corner with her plate on her knees. She really liked to suck and gnaw the bones. She was a big dog of a girl. One afternoon the whole family was going to the cinema, except me. I had been running a fever for several days, and I had to stay at home in bed in my long cotton nightshirt. I heard my mother instructing Marcella to take good care of me—have you already heard this story?"

"Go on."

"If I've already told you. . . . So I remained alone at home. My mother had told Marcella to make me an orange drink and to feel my forehead from time to time to see if I still had a temperature. I suppose

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I dozed for a while; then I felt this big hand clamped onto my forehead, a hand as rough as a cheese grater. Then I felt her pulling up my night-shirt and taking my willy in her hand. And I watched what she was doing without an idea of what was going on. She got down on her knees and moved her face over my chest as if she were warming me with her breath, and then she took this little pea pod of a penis in her mouth. I let out a yell. She grabbed me in her arms and roared with laughter. That laugh really disturbed me. It was that mad laugh that made me keep still, that and a kind of languor, as if I were being tickled or a lizard were running down my spine. She kept on playing with my penis, first with her tongue and then with her teeth. I couldn't have said what I was feeling. I wanted to laugh as well, because of the tickling. She had a big head of wiry curls like a shaggy animal, and she kept giving out groans, until I thought that she had caught the fever off me. And then I noticed for the first time in my life that my little thing had got harder and bigger. Suddenly, as if an idea had just come into her head, she jumped to her feet and went to her room. She came back with an aubergine, purple. Squatting, she stuck it between her legs and then knelt down again beside me."

"I hope it was one of those long, thin ones."

"No. It was big. Really big. She kept moving her hand about between her legs and I didn't know what she could have been doing. And she kept *uggiolando*, baying. I lost consciousness somehow, as if everything were blotted out. She let out the sort of really long howl that I used to hear from our dog Titina on moonlit nights. Then she got up and shut herself in her room. Later, she tried to tell me it was a joke, a secret game we had played together, and made me swear on a figurine of the Madonna never to tell. The next day, because I still had a touch of fever, I was left alone in the house again for a while. I went into her room; in the drawer of her bedside table, wrapped round and round by her underwear, I found what I thought was a fish because of the way it stank. It was the aubergine."

"Remind me never to make you that pasta with aubergines and anchovies."

"I never told anyone about this because I really didn't know how to. I didn't have the vocabulary to describe what had happened. My father must have got wind of something, for a few days later I came across

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into sex in a very powerful way; all the emphasis was on the animal aspect of the physicality of sexuality, and at the same time it resonated with a greedy, gluttonous, drunken, infernal atmosphere of sin. We caught a whiff of sulfur off a woman who displayed her availability, and a strange light from hell played around her. This sexual initiation is stupendous; I'm sorry for all those who came after us, who didn't experience it. They have lost their roots and got nothing in return; they are more, not less, ignorant than we.

"Perhaps this will be the providential function of AIDS. It has made sex dangerous again. Sex always was dangerous, of course, but in a metaphysical sense. The Church in her wisdom interpreted that risk, of annihilation or satiation and disgust, as damnation and insured that we approach this activity with due caution. Each generation makes its own conquest of the unknown areas of life, but the liberated generation had no option but to feel that there was no fascinating unknown land. They inherited banal sex, and AIDS has come to rescue them. It is a grim and horrible alternative, of course, but typical of our epoch."

"It has come too late for the boys on the Spanish Steps," I said. "They have escaped the banality of life by embracing the greater banality of death. The only adventure seems to be flirtation with death, tinkering with one's own body, titillating and thrilling it with poison. I am concerned that all pleasure these days is predicated on masturbation."

Fellini made a *moue*, rejecting my puritanism. "Masturbation makes you concentrate on that part of yourself which is in contact with the cosmos," he said, like any old hippie sex-doctor. I looked at him in surprise, as I occasionally do when he talks of Castaneda or H.P. Lovecraft with all the appearance of respect. We talked for a long time about whether human experience can be impoverished by the proliferation of commercial stimuli, whether all the dreams have materialized. "I continue to believe," said Federico, "that reality is the source of everything; fact is more dream-like than dreams. If that were not the case, the planet would be covered with completely inert people. The personal is always unique, astonishing; it is not possible to make life less interesting than fantasy, because life is the source of fantasy." No second law of thermodynamics for Fellini; I wanted to believe him, and I almost succeeded.

Though I knew that Fellini never loses contact with Giulietta—whom he telephones several times every day, just to hear her voice, I think, for

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he usually says very little—I had no idea of his deep affection and respect for her until I asked him how he reacts to popular fame and being recognized in the street. Rome is Fellini's city; he is loved, admired, greeted, and insulted wherever he goes, and he clearly basks in this promiscuous social contact.

"You must be one of the few film directors, if not the only one, whose face is familiar even to small children."

"It's not me they know so much. I'm married to an actress who is very well known and much loved. I think lots of people identify me as the husband of Giulietta. Giulietta is as familiar as Minnie Mouse; she's like a stylized character from a comic strip. Everyone feels he knows her, especially women of a certain age and little kids. She's a real actress; she loves to appear and project. She's intensely professional, perfectionist about every detail of her performance." (It seems, in fact, that Giulietta Masina is one actress who challenges Fellini's omnipotence as director and dares to resist his choice of makeup, wig, and costume.) "It's Gelsomina they love, and she plays up to their love and their expectations. She is a great star, and she knows how to handle it."

"The fact is," Fellini went on, "I'm not popular in that sense. My films are not popular films. Oh, I'm not talking about *La strada* and *La dolce vita*. Since *Otto e mezzo* the films I make are not popular, but I have become a popular director. Now I've got the reputation of being the director whose films no one can understand, and they like me for that." Here Fellini drops into Roman argot to describe the reactions of the populace when they catch sight of him. "*Guarda che paraculo. Questo fi'o de 'a nigrotta fa film che non se ne capisce un cazzo a contima a farli.*' Romans admire cunning and effrontery. In fact, the Romans like me more, because they think I'm getting away with the most colossal con trick." And again he does an exact imitation, with semi-obscene gestures, of young toughs ragging him: "*Eh! Federí, ai mortacci. . . .*"

"The lady I had dinner with last night said, when I told her you were making a film about lunatics, 'If you ask me, he should be in a madhouse himself.' "

Fellini was delighted. "You see! It's true. They think I'm as mad as a hatter, and they respect me more for it. My popularity is based on my preposterousness. When I say that my films are not popular, I mean that people feel that they are obliged to some extent to go and see

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them, but they keep on saying, 'This Fellini, who knows what he's on about?' Don't think I'm upset by it. It suits me fine. Look, after thirty years they're still arguing about *Otto e mezzo*. I take a lot of cabs. I always sit in front so I can talk with the driver. I don't know how many times I've had this conversation. *'Si'or Federí*, last night they showed *Otto e mezzo* on television. It's the third time I've seen it, and I still don't understand a fucking thing about it. I've got a daughter who goes to university, and she explained to me that it's not about a movie director but about men.' 'Yes. Quite right. It could also be the story of a cabdriver.' 'Yes? Hm. Well, I still don't get it.' No, my films aren't popular, but I'm popular as a character."

Fellini is aware, as he says this, that he made of himself a character, a *personaggio*, in *Otto e mezzo*, now called *Fellini Otto e mezzo*. He said as he took a young actor through a rather arduous test for *Il canto della luna*, "You've got to show them that there's more to my success than Mastroianni." Nevertheless, he sometimes feels hemmed in by the legend and has enjoyed the freedom of working on smaller-scale projects like *I clowns, Prova d'orchestra*, and *Intervista*, which were made for television.

"I'd be a hypocrite if I said that I didn't enjoy being recognized. As long as people are not aggressive or interfering, it is enjoyable. In all these years I can't remember a single unpleasant incident or ever being embarrassed by people in the street."

In *Intervista* there is a character called Chiodo, a Fellini fan who dogs his footsteps at Cinecittà. This personage, together with most of the other bit players in the film, is playing himself, a situation that the union politics of the film industry would make impossible elsewhere.

"I don't go to receptions and prize-giving ceremonies, though, and I never appear on television. It is gratifying to be celebrated and receive that kind of recognition, I suppose, but I always feel ill at ease. Giulietta appears often on television, because she's the patroness of UNICEF here and she does a lot of charity work for children, so she has to take part in all that *cerimonialità*. That gets me off the hook to some extent."

I did not ask if Giulietta's interest in children's charities might not be a way of functioning as a mother at one remove and working out her grief at the loss of their only child, who died in infancy. As Fellini does not understand women's feelings about babies, I did not expect a sensible

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answer. He once asked me—and this is a very rare question from Fellini, who never discusses his films once they are made—if I had liked *Giulietta degli spiriti*, and I was obliged to tell him that I did not approve of his commandeering Giulietta's fantasies and distorting them in his own image. When I said that I found the film too schematic, too reductive of the numinousness of Giulietta's spiritual vision, he nodded his head and changed the subject. You never know with Fellini if something you have said has gone home. You'll swear he was not listening—he was probably whistling almost soundlessly between his teeth as you spoke—and five years later he will remind you of what you said.

"I get letters from admirers every day: Fiammetta [*Fiammetta Profili, Fellini's secretary*] answers most of them, and some I answer. Most of them ask for money and give me stacks of medical certificates and documentation of all kinds to show that they are deserving cases and to get my sympathy. I look at them all briefly, but there's nothing we can do, Giulietta and I: we just don't have that kind of money. And I get an enormous number of photographs sent me, photographs of wives, children; that comes with the job. Every day I get thirty or forty screenplays, and we always return them unopened. Every time one of my films comes out, we get ten letters from ten lawyers claiming to represent someone whose work I'm supposed to have stolen. The lawyers take it on to get themselves publicity. I have had a score of legal actions brought by people who claim to have written the originals of my films; they never win, but it is an enormous waste of time and energy, so now we return them all with the seal unbroken. But generally people's reactions to me are lighthearted, good-humored, and I enjoy them."

"Ever been robbed?"

"Giulietta was robbed once in the street. She will carry valuables in a shoulder bag. It makes me so mad to see her going about like that, but she always says that she has no other way of carrying things, so. . . . One day she was taking some things to the jewelers to be mended, two rings and some platinum cuff links of mine. We were just turning the corner of Via Margutta, and a Lambretta with two boys on it came past. Giulietta was talking to me and didn't notice at first that one of the boys had snatched her bag. As soon as she told me, I bounded off like a kangaroo, yelling, 'Stop, thief!' So the boys on the scooter started yelling, 'Stop, thief!' as well. I followed them round the corner of Via

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Babuino, and there was a big lout of a policeman with a helmet and a gun, lolling on an enormous motorcycle. 'They've stolen my wife's bag!' I said. He looked at me and sneered, 'What am I supposed to do about it?' When I came home the next afternoon, there was a man propped against the wall reading a newspaper. '*Eh, Federí,*' he said, 'why don't you take a look in Trastevere?' When I started asking him who he was and to repeat what he had said, he said he hadn't spoken. So I went to Trastevere and wandered about. I went into a bar at one point and a boy said to me, 'Giulietta shouldn't have gone to the police station.' 'Why not?' 'The stuff, you want it back or not?' I was really enjoying all this. So I gave him our telephone number. After a few days a man telephoned and asked for Giulietta. He said a little boy had brought him a packet and told him to ring that telephone number. He gave the name of a bar in Trastevere, so I went there that afternoon and the packet was waiting for me in the drawer of the cash register. They didn't want anything, no reward, nothing. And the next day we got a letter saying, 'Pardon us, Gelsomina.' Dickensian stuff, no?"

From the loving detail with which he embellished this story—much of which, as it consisted in exact renditions of Roman argot and minute characterizations of the policeman and the Trasteverini, I have been obliged to suppress—I could see that of all the women Fellini calls "my actresses," Giulietta is the one of whom he is most proud. This fact has never cramped his style, except once.

"All my best films are the ones I never made. The family called me once and asked me to come and see my father, who was ill. I told Giulietta I had to go to Rimini for a few days on family business and arranged that a certain *bella signora* would come with me. I installed her in a little hotel and went off to see my father, who apologized for taking me away from my work and said that there was nothing seriously wrong. The household was all taken up with looking after him, so I went to a nearby restaurant to get something to eat. The old horse-cab driver suddenly appeared at my table. '*Dottor* Fellini, *Dottor* Fellini, come at once.' I jumped up from the table and rushed back to the house, but I was too late. My father was dead. Obviously, I had to take over and make the funeral arrangements and look after my mother. I was lying in my father's place, next to my mother in their bed, when I realized that I had completely forgotten the *bella signora,* who was still

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made by a balloon floating against a sky of nylon, shining behind trees whose every twig has been mortised by an army of brilliant carpenters. Why does he not make his film in a real asylum with a real garden surrounded by real fields? He says, "Because it is not an asylum, but the asylum; not a garden, but the garden; not a wheat field, but the one, the only, the archetypal wheat field." All accidentals are purged. I ask him if he has seen Bertolucci's *La luna* and realize that he has forgotten that Bertolucci ever made a film of that name. My admiration for Bertolucci annoys him, but he listens unusually carefully, with a gleam of unwilling admiration in his eye, when I describe the sequence of the moon seen over his mother's shoulder by the child on her bicycle as she pedals along the road. Fellini seldom goes to the cinema and will certainly not see Bertolucci's film, because he is now intent on getting his own images true to his obsession.

"And that's the way I treat women, too. I'm forced to exaggerate their femaleness. I have to go beyond personality, beyond the accidental. It's part of my trade. I have a distorted vision, like a gynecologist. I'm looking all the time for what will make a woman appear more like the essence of woman. And it is obviously what makes her not-man. I have to emphasize her otherness. Not stereotype, but archetype and, inevitably, the archetype as I have perceived it since those initial traumas. There's nothing else I can do." It is hardly surprising, then, that Fellini's female figures have now assumed the proportions of the Willendorf Venus.

To portray Federico Fellini, I would have to show you Fellini the *burattinaio*, the puppeteer. You would not be allowed in the makeup room, where Fellini establishes his intimacy with his actor, helpless in the makeup chair as his face is made over into an expressive mask and Fellini draws him into his power in a long dialogue. Fellini's contribution is a soft-spoken, hypnotic series of suggestions, linked by subtle psychological caresses that charm the actor's superego to sleep. On the sound stage Fellini plays all the parts, using the actors as masks, crooning the dialogue (which will be postsynced eventually) in whatever language his actor understands best through that same megaphone: "Ah! Aah! Aa-aa-gh! What ecstasy! What agony! My spine will snap! Aa-agh! Take hair in your arms, stroke hair, like a cat, shoo, shoo! Good, very good." And you would have to see him in his black preproduction

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"Chatting about Other Things": An Interview with Federico Fellini

TONI MARAINI/1991

FEDERICO FELLINI'S FANTASY WORLD, which has become more dreamlike over the years, shows us the spectacle of life. Yet, paradoxically, the most surreal of Italian directors invites us to reflect on reality.

What is this reality, which contains everything that happens? Where is it? In us? Outside of us? In our memory, which turns into myth? In the real events that seem like dreams or in dreams that materialize in an immense farce wherein existence is the tragicomic appearance? Like Pirandello before him, Fellini meditates on the ease with which we cross the borders that supposedly mark the difference between reality and appearance.

As in the short film *The Interview*, which he made for Italian television, Fellini identifies a film director with the demiurge of a Great Spectacle. "My films are not for understanding. They are for seeing," Fellini reminds anyone who persists in undervaluing the aim of his aesthetic orientation.

I talked about this and other things with Fellini in his Rome studio sometime after his last film, *La voce della luna* (*The Voice of the Moon*). Courteous, cordial, gifted with a good sense of humor, Fellini, who is mistrustful of journalists—and who loves paradox and

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ambiguity—kindly tried not to talk about this mistrust. "Really, we should chat about other things," he told me.

M: *You don't like to give interviews and it's difficult for a journalist to get one. You should know I'm more a poet than a journalist.*
F: Splendid.

M: *Here's something that will amuse you. Because of the anxiety I had about doing this interview, I woke up voiceless this morning, unable to make a sound!*
F: Perfect. I love journalists who don't talk much.

I'm reluctant to give interviews because I believe we should avoid them and I'm trying to hold to this sane decision. But in certain cases I end up by accepting, because there are friends who insist I do interviews. Then there's the curiosity of meeting somebody new. Also it's flattering; so out of an indecent vanity and a shameless desire to prattle about myself, I consent.

I've given a lot of interviews; so, I don't trust what I say. I repeat myself. I try to remember what I've already said and what I still haven't said. For fear of repeating something I've already said, I invent other things.

M: *You mistrust yourself, then?*
F: Yes, that's right. I mistrust myself, not the journalist, even if for fifty years I've had the feeling that journalists asked me stupid questions.

An interview is a halfway point between a psychoanalytical sitting and a competitive examination. So, I experience a slight uneasiness about all the interviews I've given. I try to rethink myself rather than repeat myself. And besides, I have some embarrassing limits. Sometimes I don't have answers.

M: *Your answers are already in your films, by having created them.*
F: That's right. The author's most important answer is the work itself, and in my work people have found the few things I tried to say. Despite that, the author generally is the least suited to talk about his work.

M: *Those who see the film want to ask questions, and, after all, this need is stimulated by creation. In order to try to understand your last film, for*

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example, I reread some paragraphs from Krishnamurti, whom you know as a thinker.

F: Yes, yes. In which book did you find these paragraphs? I'd like to see them.

Nevertheless, I don't think that an author, when he creates, poses "others'" problems. Really, when I'm working, I don't think of others. Certainly, the author is conscious of the, as we say, "craft" side of his own creation, of the *how to* express what he wants to say. But I don't think he worries too much about the problem *of why and whom* to tell.

M: *Yet, even if you don't tell it "to others," like every creator you tell it to yourself. In this self-telling, doesn't reevaluation go on, a gradual, revelatory consciousness of self?*

F: As in life generally, the experience of working brings a greater mastery at the technical level, and, therefore, better reasoning about choices and how to carry them out. But in the deeper sense of knowing to which you alluded, the idea that through my work I may have a greater knowledge of myself, I will tell you I don't think there has been an evolution. On my last birthday, a friend asked me what it meant for me to be seventy, and my spontaneous response was, "Seventy? It seems to me I've always been seventy!"

So you see, my answer reflects my true feeling. For me, at seventy, I'm not much different from what I was at forty, thirty-five, twenty-five, or even earlier.

M: *This doesn't so much mean you've always had the feeling of being seventy, but rather—if I understand you—that reaching this age and looking back you have the feeling of always having had the same age from youth on.*

F: Yes, the adolescent age. Exactly. It's totally an adolescent age. Whoever has created knows this state that I would call "motionless time."

M: *But it's precisely this state of pure consciousness and spontaneity that anyone who creates tries to conquer or rather to safeguard.*

F: You're referring still to our Krishnamurti!

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I tried to catch this picture of the tyrant director in *The Interview.* He was a figure that seduced me despite everything. But at that time I never thought I'd be a director; I lacked the temperament, the voice, the authority, the arrogance. . . . I thought that I would be a writer or a painter, or, better, a "special correspondent." But it turns out that I had all those defects! Because I became a director . . . for a kind of pleasure. Out of an entomologist's curiosity. My films are films of expression.

I agreed to direct *The Interview* in order to keep a contract. I see in myself an artist of the 1400s, one who needed a client, which at that time was often the church. In its deep understanding of the human soul, the need for being lured and at the same time threatened, the church understood the adolescent nature of the artist. But today this aspect is no longer taken into consideration. Yet I, for example, need a client.

For *The Interview,* I had a commitment to TV, a contract for a special. Since I had an upbringing that respects the rules of a pledge, I wanted to keep it. So, this TV film came about in this way, by itself, without traumas, because it offered the freedom of lightheartedness, the seductive aspect of something that doesn't build up expectations.

Making a film is an adventurous journey, above all for producers. Looking back, I can't say I complain. Every film has its troubles, its delays, but the obstacles on a journey represent part of the journey itself. The trip is enriched by difficulties that reveal mysterious, even providential expressions of friendship. For *The Interview,* I didn't have these problems of getting started, of setting off on the film's journey. But for my last film, *The Voice of the Moon,* yes.

I covered this last film with insults, I tried to kick it away like one does with an illness you don't want to catch. In order not to catch pneumonia, what do you do? You try to defend yourself.

M: *You declared once, long ago, in* 1969, *that "a film is like an illness that is expelled from the body."*

F: No doubt there's a connection between pathology and creation, we can't deny it. Yet I view with pleasure the work of film professionals I love, such as Buñuel, Kurosawa, Kubrick, Bergman.

I'm perhaps a special type of spectator. I experience pleasure when I find myself in front of something that is the absolute truth, *not* because

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it resembles life, but because it's true as an image for itself, as a gesture. And therefore vital. It's the vitality that makes me appreciate and feel that the action succeeded. I think the expression of an artist's work finds consensus when, whoever enjoys it, feels as if they're receiving a charge of energy, like a growing plant does, of something pulsing, mysterious, vibrant with life.

M: *Going back to the difficulty of starting your* Voice . . . *film, from documents it would seem that these difficulties started with shooting the first scene in your first film as director,* The White Sheik. *And then there was that long business of completing* The City of Women.

F: Yes, perhaps, but sometimes the problems aren't caused by me but by producers. However, when I'm in the harrowing phase and feel restless, it means I'm ready to start, that I must start, that I can begin the film. And initially I need to observe, to meet people with simplicity, as happens on a bus or a train; I need to sketch. I reflect, observe some details, a tic, a gesture, a color, a face.

M: *An "entomologist's curiosity," you said. Also toward women?*

F: Woman is a marvel; woman is a universe. This may be a tantric conception: Woman is the alien part of man, but she is higher than he, because women are born adults, ancient. You're born knowing everything. As mothers, you're superior. For survival, an archetypal rebellion exists in women's memory, because man has invented for himself an intellectual supremacy, a violence he uses to dominate her. But the struggle is unequal.

You smile. You really don't seem to believe me! Or maybe you're asking me how it was done, because I still haven't written a beautiful love story for my films.

M: *But the story of Zampano and Gelsomina in* La strada *is a love story, even if unusual and terrible.*

F: Yes, it was. But I, and I'm embarrassed to share this confidence, I have to confess that I've never identified myself with excesses of passion and love. I seem never to have been in love in that sense. I don't understand the desperation of love as an irreparable loss.

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M: *I'd like to ask you a question concerning the costumes you draw for your films, which sometimes are particularly elegant, as if they were from a different era than ours. What does this mean?*

F: In certain films like *Satyricon* or *Casanova*, the costumes of the era were necessary because the films were historical. That's obvious. I have the habit of looking back to styles of the '20s and '30s, because this unconscious reference goes back to an emotional reality when I discovered and noticed things. Lights, colors, attitudes, moods, usages, rhythms belong to this emotional reality.

In addition, there is another fact. A person's clothes make up part of his character. I draw the character with his costume. I suggest it to the stylists with my drawings; the drawings translate some of my emotional impressions. For me elegance happens when there is a correspondence between a person's personality and how she dresses herself. Finally, don't forget that costumes, like dreams, are symbolic communication. Dreams teach us that a language for everything exists—for every object, every color worn, every clothing detail. Hence, costumes provide an aesthetic objectification that helps to tell the character's story.

M: *You talk about a certain "first impression," which is tied to the play of memory and nostalgia. Is it perhaps a flight from the present era?*

F: Our times are extraordinary and marvelous; everything has happened and continues to happen. After the Berlin Wall fell, the people on either "side" were no longer enemies, and ideologies stopped being barriers to truth. All of politics is up for rethinking.

But you know, I never managed to follow the route of neorealism, the problems of the working class.

M: *Yet there are so many social critiques in your films.*

F: Certainly! If metalworkers didn't dream, there would be only a hunk of metal.

M: *Tell me about a film you never started, the one about Carlos Castaneda.*

F: It's a very complicated story.

I first looked for Castaneda through his publishers. I talked with the publisher, who gave me the address of Castaneda's agent, a Ned Brown in New York. The publisher told me it would be easy for Brown to give

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me Castaneda's address. Once a year a Mexican boy brought the publisher manuscripts. Ned Brown told me he had never met Castaneda.

Persisting in my search, I was told that Castaneda was in an insane asylum, even that he was dead. Someone else said he'd met him and that he was alive, that he had seen him at a lecture Castaneda gave. Then, in Rome, there was a Mrs. Ioghi who put me in contact with him. And I finally met Castaneda.

Castaneda's personality is quite different from what you might imagine. He seemed like a Sicilian—a cordial, easygoing, smiling Sicilian host. Brown skin, black eyes, a very white smile. He has the effusiveness of a Latin, a Mediterranean. He's Peruvian, not Mexican.

M: *Are you sure it was really him?*

F: What are you trying to say? Of course; he was surrounded by other people. Mrs. Ioghi knew him.

This likable gentleman, who had seen all my films, told me that one day with Don Juan, thirty or forty years ago, he had seen my film *La strada*—which was made in 1952. Don Juan had told him, "You will have to meet the director of this film." He said that Don Juan had prophesied this meeting. That's what Castaneda told me. I told you that he came to find me, here, in this living room, seated right here.

From the beginning I was fascinated by his book *The Teachings of Don Juan*, a book about esoteric, parapsychological ventures. Then I was fascinated by the overall idea: that of a scientific man, an anthropologist, who starts with a speculative, scientific purpose, a man who keeps his feet on the ground, watches where he's going and literally looks at the ground, in fields, in vegetable gardens, in glades, toward the hills—where mushrooms grow. This man of science then finds himself, after initiation, following a path that brings him into contact with some ancient Toltecs.

I like the route supplied by a scientific, rational curiosity, a route that he took with a rational attention and which, at the same time, led him toward the mysterious world, a world we define in a vague way as "irrational."

M: *This relation between science and a supernatural world seems especially interesting. In this connection, you talked about your experience with LSD,*

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it was black magic. His women, but not Castaneda, went with me to Tulun, and the same things happened there.

M: *You felt threatened, and Castaneda disappeared.*
F: It's been some years—that was in 1986—and I still haven't been able to figure out what really happened. Maybe Castaneda was sorry to have brought me there and worked out a series of phenomena that discouraged me from making my film. Or maybe his associates didn't want me to make a film and did these things. Anyway, it was all too strange, so I decided not to make the film.

Castaneda's books brought back some feelings that I had experienced as a boy. . . . It's difficult to define. . . . Maybe madness can resemble this kind of astral, icy cold, solitary silence. I put one boyhood experience in *The Voice of the Moon*, when Benigni tells his grandmother that he became a poplar tree. It happened when I was a boy and spent the summer with my grandmother, Francesca, my father's mother, in the country at Gambettola.

M: *The name of this place, Gambettola, could come from a fable, some sort of Pinocchio adventure. . . .*
F: Yes! It was also called "the forest," because there was a large forest nearby. There, I had a few experiences that I remembered only thirty or forty years later. They came back in a more hallucinatory or more revivified way because I was reading some parapsychological texts. In short, they were experiences of special feelings. First was the episode of the poplar tree.

I was able to translate sounds into colors, an experience that happened to me afterward. I could chromatize sounds. It's a faculty that can surprise us, but which seems natural to me, given that life is a single thing, a *totality* that we have learned to divide, file, separate, tying different sensations together in different ways.

Here I was seated under that poplar at Gambettola, and I heard the ox lowing in the stable. At the same time, I saw coming out of the stable's wall something fibrillating, like an enormous tongue, a mat, a carpet, a flying carpet moving slowly in the air.

I was sitting with my back to the stall, but I could see everything around me and behind me, 360 degrees. And this wave dissolved,

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M: *What do you mean by "veglia"? [Literally, "waking" or "wakefulness."]*
F: Peasant men got together in the stable at night to drink, and eat bread and cheese. It was a way for them to be together for some hours, even up to eleven at night, which was late for them because they had to get up at four in the morning.

Besides telling stories, they laughed, joked; they laughed, talking about women. The laughs were a way of exorcising, of defending themselves, a form of nervousness. And I, still a young boy, didn't understand very well why, when the men were talking about women, they poked each other with their elbows and laughed. As if they were alluding to something vaguely comic, but also indecent, something from which they defended each other, protected each other, conspiring to create a solidarity.

M: *You told me in one of our conversations that you've always had a latent envy for anyone who expresses, even in a primitive way, a conviction, a creed, a dogma. You, who don't want to take refuge in any rigid system of convictions or ideologies, what's your "center," your "pivot"? The cinema?*
F: Do you mean "when do I feel at home"?

M: *Yes.*
F: You ask a question that's not so simple to answer. I think my pivot point is finding myself in a nowhere in which I recognize myself. Said that way, it can seem like romantic complacency, shamelessly poetic.

M: *No, no, I understand your answer very well. I've written about the nowhere. It's a perception I know well precisely because I believe that creative people are acquainted with it. That is, people who have refused the comfort of certainties, of dogmatic, ideological constructions.*
F: A less esoteric and less presumptuous center is my work, when I'm seized, when I have an identity, am caught up by what I'm doing. As in driving a nail, putting up a wall on a set, putting a wig on an actress's head, seeing that the makeup is just right; when I'm on the go, obsessed in filming in the midst of a group of people who look at me with the respect due to age and, maybe, also with a little worry and amusement.

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I lend my body, my common sense, or talent to something that is a stream, a stream that invites me, obliges me, forces me to personify myself in so many things, persons, thoughts, attitudes. And there, just at the moment in which I'm not there—since I'm in so many places taken up by so many details—is, I believe, my pivot point.

I believe that for me this is happiness—to lose one's memory, to forget the self, the part you call yourself, which is really just a superstructure. This is the part you forget in order to be inhabited by an energy that borrows your body and your nervous system.

M: *There's a big contradiction between what the West maintains, driving people to look for themselves, fortifying their own personality, and what the East maintains, which encourages you to free yourself from yourself. The problem seems to be that of liberating the self without destroying it.*

F: It's important to put yourself in a condition to be everlastingly born. In any case, I consider myself particularly fortunate because of my profession. Which isn't a profession, but only a path, a route for amusement, for levity. It can lead you to have—in a free, nonschematic, nondogmatic way—intuitions that others have had with more sacrifices and in a more dramatic way. It's a game that puts you in touch with other territories, intuitions of different possibilities. Perhaps these intuitions are paler, less colorful than those earned more dramatically and knowingly, with more sacrifices.

M: *You said that you love directors like Bergman, Buñuel, Kurosawa. Do you go to the movies often?*

F: I'm embarrassed to confess, no, I don't go to the movies much. I've never gone much. As a boy in Rimini, they let me go to the movies once a week.

No, no, it wasn't a matter of cost. Our family was petit bourgeois. My father was a sales representative. My brother and I went to the movies accompanied by Alfredo, a handyman who worked in my father's warehouse.

When I came to Rome, at eighteen, I began to go more often. There were two cinemas on the street where I lived, San Giovanni. But I went most of all because I was fascinated by the crude variety shows. First there was the film and immediately after it the variety shows.

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Biography / Film

"A film takes form outside your will as a constructor; all genuine details come through inspiration."

The films of Federico Fellini (1920–1993) deal equally with truth-tellers and pretenders, realists and fabulists. His colorful, surreal vision of cinema is so distinctive that the term "Felliniesque" is common among film buffs, even those who have not seen any of his films. This collection of interviews spans the director's entire career from 1957 to 1993.

Even in his interviews, Fellini activated his feverish imagination. Friends and enemies alike were quick to call him a *bugiardo*—a big liar. It is perhaps more accurate to note that, as in his films, Fellini understood the inherent theatricality of all performance, including the interview form, and that artifice is just as revealing as plain truth. In his conversations with interviewers and the media, he often blurred the line between factual truth and sheer invention.

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CONVERSATIONS WITH FILMMAKERS

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